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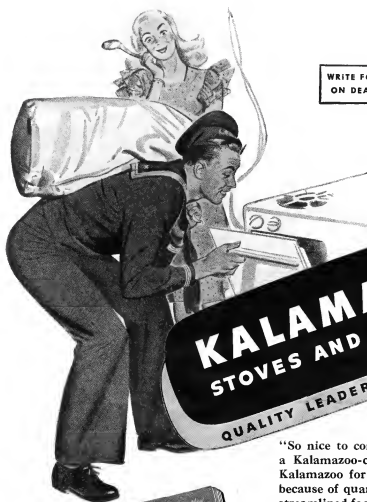
DETECTIVE

MAGAZINE

FRANCIS K. ALLAN
CYRIL PLUNKETT
AND MANY OTHERS

I'LL BE KILLING YOU-
A SATAN HALL NOVEL
by CARROLL JOHN DALY
DEATH IS LIKE THAT
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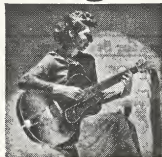
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MAGAZINE

Vol. 7

Contents for September, 1945

No. 2

FULL-LENGTH NOVEL OF THE UNDERWORLD

I'LL BE KILLING YOU —.....Carroll John Daly 32

They met in a final rendezvous—the up-and-coming master of murder, and the cop who wouldn't be killed!

A NOVEL OF MIDNIGHT MURDER

DEATH IS LIKE THAT.....W. T. Ballard 8

"You're doing your best to turn up a dead man, pal. A dead man who's going to be—you!"

SHORT STORIES

THE FOOL'S PAWN.....Francis K. Allan 22

There was just one bedtime story Joe knew—and the night he told it to his boy was one which might have no tomorrow. . . .

CRIMSON HARVEST.....Rex Whitechurch 48

The road to hell is paved with good inventions—and this killer's alibi was one of them!

LET ME KILL YOU, SWEETHEART.....Martin Eden 54

All Charlie Fletcher wanted was wine, song—and one woman. The melody was old—but the words read: Let me kill you, sweetheart!

DEATH'S DARK DOORWAY.....Cyril Plunkett 59

The little gold cross was a symbol of eternal life—and soundless death!

FLIGHT'S END.....Robert C. Dennis 63

"You can run away from life, boy. But somewhere, some time, you reach the end of the trail—and meet a guy named Death!"

IF LOOKS COULD KILL.....Seymour Irving Richin 78

It was a grim farewell party the police gave little Jacqueline—when they showed her a mirror which distorted her loveliness into a hideous caricature of a murderess!

FACT CRIME STORIES

MURDER CASTLE.....Joseph Fulling Fishman 70

One good cop unearthed a saga of horror unequalled in the crime's annals.

THE LADY FROM HELL.....Zeta Rothschild 84

The smiling, kindly lady of Liege—whose ministering hands brought death!

ADDED FEATURES

SOLVING CIPHER SECRETS.....M. E. Ohaver 29

Come in on this never-more-timely feature—and meet the secret code-makers! And we're catching up on Club news!

STRANGE TRAILS TO MURDER.....Lee 68

The case of the million murderers.

THE WITNESS CHAIR.....A Department 6

The corpse in the cask.

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The WITNESS CHAIR

HOW to get rid of the corpse of his victim is a problem which faces every murderer—and specialists in the profession have overlooked few bets. Bodies have been burned, buried, partitioned into small pieces, thrown into the water, packed in quicklime, blown to bits by explosives, hidden in abandoned mines, cast into unused wells, laid on railroad tracks to simulate accidents, and disposed of in several dozen other ways, most of them more or less standard and familiar to the police.

But every once in a while a slayer will think up a new one. This was the case with Andre Dubois, who had murdered his best friend, Desire Godasse, in a fit of peevishness, when the latter refused to loan him 10,000 francs to defray the expense of his approaching marriage. The Bal of the Red Globe, in Paris, is (or was in 1930) one of the dozens of little French cafes tucked in out-of-the-way streets, but which are known to sophisticated *boulevardiers* for the excellence of their vintages and the huge stocks in their damp and rambling wine cellars. Every night at the Globe was a gay one. But none more so than on New Years Eve.

Bonnard, the fat little proprietor, bustled back and forth, his face fixed in a "business" smile as bottle after bottle of wine was carried up from below to do its part in trying to slake the unquenchable thirst of the laughing, singing and dancing throng. But the proprietor's smile faded somewhat when, through the noise, there came an angry shout.

"Bonnard! Come here!"

The latter hurried over. That kind of a tone meant trouble. A young man jumped from his chair as Bonnard approached. No one could mistake the fury on his face.

"Taste that wine!" he commanded, pointing to a glass on the table.

"Why—what's the matter with it?"

"Taste it, that's all!" the customer thundered.

Mentally cursing the vagaries of people concerning their food and drink, Bonnard lifted the glass to his lips and took a sip.

But only one. And even this he spat out, coughing and gagging, as his face took on that seasick tinge which bespoke unbearable nausea. He shivered with disgust.

"I don't—understand," he muttered.

"Well, you'd better understand," the other menaced. "I asked for your 1910 Vouvray and paid a double price for it. And this is what I get."

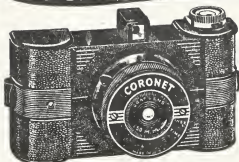
"I will investigate," Bonnard promised. He hurried downstairs, motioned to his man in charge of the cellar to follow him, and made his way, lighted by the flickering and ghostly illumination of a candle, back past innumerable casks, bottles and other receptacles, until he came to a barrel marked, "Vouvray 1910."

At his direction his cellar man drew a glassful. The stench of it was sickening. Shaken and bewildered, but determined to go through with it, Bonnard climbed up on a ladder.

(Continued on page 94)

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DEATH IS LIKE THAT

*"You're doing your best to turn up
a dead man, pal. A dead man who's
going to be—you!"*



CHAPTER ONE

Star-Maker

I MET her and for me, she was the most beautiful woman in the world. I hadn't expected her to be beautiful.

I'd expected her to be fifty and perhaps fat. She was neither. She was, I think, only a year or two older than I, but I never knew exactly, for she never discussed her age.

"You have a voice," she told me, at our

first meeting. "I've heard you a dozen times in that choir where you've been singing, but you have something else which is more important. You have a way with women, old women—" she smiled slightly as if daring me to agree with her—"women like me."

I was too tongue-tied to say anything for a moment. I knew her reputation. She had started a dozen singers on careers; she had produced a number of radio programs herself. The stories they told about her in the Times Square district, around Radio City and

By
W. T. Ballard

*When Connie found out
the gun wasn't even loaded
he swore harshly. . . .*



in the Hollywood night clubs were almost too fabulous to be believed. They sounded like the ravings of an overworked press agent, but I knew they were true.

Lida Hale had been born in a trunk. Her family were show people and she had had her first walk-on part at three, coming out of the wings in a little white and pink dress. There was a picture on her dressing table of this child, and Lida always referred to her in the third person.

"Poor little kid," she'd say. "Never a mud pie, never a sled and a snowy hill to slide down. You don't know how lucky you are, Pete."

She was calling me Pete by then. In fact she started calling me Pete that first afternoon in her office.

"We'll make a star out of you, Pete," she'd promised. "We won't make another Crosby or another Sinatra. We'll make you Pete Sheaffer. It won't be easy. You're going to work, my lad, work as you've never worked before. But, I'll personally guarantee that if you take orders, if you do everything I tell you to, you'll be making a thousand a week, or better, within a year."

I stared.

I thought she was crazy. I was making two hundred and fifty a month and picking up change, singing on the outside. I couldn't act. I didn't know what a mike looked like, and I'm no beauty.

"Rave on," I said and stared at her. The desk was of light wood. The walls were light and a thick white rug covered the office floor.

Even at the desk she wore fox furs about her throat and I was to learn that she loved them, better even than life itself. Her hair was silver white, not platinum, and I'd have guessed that she was twenty-seven.

She smiled at me and picked up the gold-plated telephone. "Tony, darling," she said. "Pick up a contract and come over here. I want you to meet my latest chump."

That's how I met Lida Hale. I met Tony that afternoon also—Tony Mahone, her attorney, her partner and, as she was wont to say, her brains.

He was about forty, I judged, thin and trim and well-tailored. His hair was grey at the temples and dark curly on top. His face was thin, his mouth sensitive and a little cynical.

His eyes were dark and soft looking. Somehow they did not go with the rest of his face. Maybe it was the eyelashes. They were very long and inclined to curl. He was, I thought, one of the most striking men I had ever met. He looked at Lida and I thought, "He loves her," and a pang went through me. This woman, whom I had met less than half an hour before, had captured my imagination. I'm not certain that she hadn't captured the rest of me.

We were married the following July.

IF YOU own a radio, you've heard me sing. If you go to the pictures, you've seen me on the screen. I wonder just how much you know about me, how much you think of me as an individual, divorced from the characters I've played. The chances are that, if certain things had not happened, you'd have never known anything else, that I'd have remained the Pete Sheaffer who played *Torrid Nights*, who sang in *Moonstruck* and who sells you evaporated milk over the air every Tuesday night.

After our marriage, Lida continued on as my agent. In fact my main complaint was that she was more agent than wife. "You're a fool," she said. "You don't seem to realize what I'm doing for you."

"I realize," I admitted. We were in our penthouse, atop one of New York's better known hotels. Below us, coming faintly like the waves of a distant ocean, I could hear the swish of late traffic on Park Avenue.

"I can't help but realize. I've become a national figure, thanks to you, my darling, and I'm not. I'm just Pete Sheaffer, the boy from Ohio. It was fun at first, fun having waiters recognize me, fun having people turn and stare, but now—"

"Now!" I knew that tone. It was Lida's tone when she was aroused, when someone was crossing her.

"Now," I said. "I don't like it. What's the

use of working my head off, if I can't have a moment's peace to myself? I won't do it."

"Am I interrupting something?" It was Tony Mahone, looking exactly as he had on that first afternoon in Lida's office, poised, suave, cynical.

"Come in," said Lida. "This fool won't listen to reason. He refuses to do what I tell him."

"A very bad trait in a husband," Tony came across the room to lean against the mantel. "What's our little boy scout refusing to do now?"

"He won't take Genny to dinner," Lida said, and she made it sound as if I'd failed her in the most important thing in life. "I can't seem to make him understand that publicity is what he lives on, what keeps him going."

"I'm old-fashioned," I told Mahone. "I know exactly what will happen. I'll take Genny out several times, and then my darling wife will tip off a columnist and there'll be a squib. 'What actor is crossing what agent with what songbird—' or something equally intelligent. Genny's a nice kid. She is a little green at this business, almost as bad as I was a couple of years ago. I'm not going to have her hurt, merely for some cheap publicity."

"He's in love with her," said Lida. I don't think she meant it. She was merely trying to anger me.

"I'm not," I told them, rising, "but I could be." What I didn't say was that I feared that Genny Austin was attracted to me—not in any serious way. But she was just a kid, trying to break in. I was a name, and I'd been nice to her because she was Lida's newest chump. I didn't want things to go any further. I was fond of the kid, and I didn't want her hurt.

Behind me I heard Mahone chuckle. "Careful, Lida, my sweet, you'll give your boy scout ideas."

She had already given me one. I wasn't going to stay there that night. I was going out, going somewhere so that I could think. Lida by her very presence always tangled me up. Everything was always out of perspective when she was around.

IT WAS at the corner of Sixth and Forty-third that the cop stopped me. He was a young fellow, looking bigger than he was in the bulky blue uniform. "Aren't you Pete Sheaffer?" he said.

I stopped. My mind had been a thousand miles away and it took conscious effort to bring it back. "Why, yes."

"I recognized you from the pictures," he said, and his voice was not unkind. "You'd better come with me."

"Come with you?" I didn't understand and said so.

"Haven't you seen the papers?" He seemed surprised.

I shook my head and he told me. "Your wife—" he said. "She's dead. Someone killed her."

I didn't get it, even then—didn't realize that almost every headline held my name, that every cop in town was looking for me. I paid for the cab to headquarters. It was better than riding in the transportation they furnish.

I walked into the building like a man walking into a bad dream, and the first person I saw when I entered Captain Baldwin's office was Genny Austin.

She wasn't crying, but she looked as if she were going to. She sat facing away from the door, and she didn't know I was there until the captain came to his feet. "So, here you are."

She turned then and said, "Pete." It wasn't what she said, but the way she said it. I saw the glance that passed between Baldwin and the uniformed man. And then she seemed to sense her mistake and said in a more formal tone, "Mr. Sheaffer."

I said, "Hello Genny." I tried to make my voice sound normal. I made it sound too normal. That's the trouble with acting—you overplay. I knew I was doing it and the knowledge made me angry.

The cop who had picked me up hadn't told me anything. In answer to my questions he'd said, "I'll let the captain tell you." But he wasn't kidding me. Lida was dead and the police had picked me up. That could mean only one thing—there had to be something suspicious about the way she had died.

There was something suspicious. Someone had choked her to death, some time between two and five in the morning. The maid, Mary, found her when she came in with the breakfast tray at eight.

Captain Baldwin took me down to the morgue to see her. The place was white and clean, and smelled something like a hospital. I knew that he was watching every move I made, every expression of my face.

She looked very natural in death. Her face might have been a cameo, softly carved. It gave me a shock to see her lying there. Somehow it hadn't really registered that she was dead.

It was impossible that Lida was dead. I stood there, looking down at her, saying over and over to myself, "This is your wife. She's dead, you should feel grief," but I felt nothing. Maybe I was numbed by the shock, felt nothing but a haunting nameless fear that rode over me.

Baldwin was a tall man, thin with a lined face and tired eyes. He said, suddenly. "Why'd you kill her, Sheaffer? Was it because of Genny Austin?"

I turned and flared at him. "I suppose Tony Mahone told you that."

Baldwin's face was unreadable. "He told us that you and Lida quarreled last night. That you walked out."

"That's right," I said. "I went to a Turkish bath because I couldn't find a hotel room. I slept on one of the rubbing couches."

"And you could have sneaked out, gone back to the hotel, killed your wife and then gotten back to the rubbing room without anyone's seeing you."

"That's right," I said. We had a private elevator at the hotel, automatically operated. It served the three penthouses.

"You're smart," he said. "You don't deny anything we can prove. . . . How come you didn't love your wife?"

"Do you think a horse loves its master?" I asked and saw the flicker of surprise in his tired eyes.

"What are you talking about?"

I said, "Lida used me like a horse, or cow, or a slave, that belonged to her. She fed me well, saw I was decently clothed, and that was that."

"She didn't love you?" He was not trying to conceal his surprise.

I shrugged. "She loved me the way a sculptor loves the statue he's created. She created me."

"And you hated her?"

I glanced again at the body, lying now under the covering sheet which Baldwin had pulled back into place. "No," I said, slowly, surprised by the thought, for it had never really entered my mind before. "I think I pitied her. With all that she had, all that she stood for, there was only one thing that I believed she really loved—her fox furs."

He gave me a strange look. "That remark may hang you, Sheaffer, or did you read in the papers about the fox furs which were tied around her throat when she was found?"

I hadn't known that, and I was silent as we turned and walked back to the squad car. "I'd better have a lawyer," I suggested as we got in. "I don't think Tony Mahone will care to represent me."

"Why not?" Baldwin settled back after giving the driver instructions.

"Because," I said, "He was in love with Lida. He always has been, I think, at least for a long time before I ever met them."

CHAPTER TWO

Murder Mail

GENNY AUSTIN said, "We shouldn't be seeing each other, Pete. Someone—a reporter, maybe—will see us."

I smiled at her. We were in a big restau-

rant right off Times Square, one of those affairs that's a cross between a restaurant and an old-style automat.

"Don't worry about it," I said. "People are watching us now, they've watched every move I've made since I left police headquarters."

She was a small girl, brown-haired, grey-eyed. Nothing striking about her as there had been about Lida, but a warmth and understanding—something that Lida had never had.

"Pete, I'm sorry. You—you didn't kill her, did you?"

I shook my head. "No, Genny, did you?"

She looked at me, and there was a hurt deep in her eyes and I said, quickly, "I know you didn't, but the police told me you went to see her last night. The hotel record shows that you called her from the lobby at eleven-twenty, and they don't know when you left."

"She called me," said Genny. "When I got there, she accused me of being in love with you."

"Are you?"

She looked at me for a long moment. "I'm not quite sure. Sometimes I think I am, and I can't sleep; other times, I think it's merely the glamor with which Dick Frost has surrounded you."

Dick Frost was Lida's press agent. He'd been a sports reporter before setting up his own office. A smart man, cynical and yet with a soft streak in him. I'd liked him better than anyone else on the staff.

"And Tony Mahone wasn't there when you saw Lida?"

She shook her head. "No, he'd gone, but from something Lida said I judged that he was coming back. Who killed her, Pete. Did Tony?"

I looked at her sharply. "What makes you say that?"

She shrugged. "He loved her." She hesitated as if hunting for words. "And she used him like a dog. Sometimes I've caught him watching her when he didn't think anyone noticed. There was something in his eyes that I didn't like."

I said, "He's my bet, but I haven't any evidence and it's going to take evidence, Genny. Otherwise—I'll be it." I don't know why I said that. I had that haunting feeling of restlessness—a premonition. And Captain Baldwin, of course, had all but called the turn.

She reached across the table, clenching her small hand over mine. "Don't say that. You don't mean it. The police let you go."

I laughed. The sound was bitter in my own ears. "Did they? Take a look at the large gentleman at the table beside the door. He's holding that newspaper, but you can see he isn't reading it."

"A policeman?"

"Dan Topper," I said. "He knows this part of town like the back of his hand. The boys call him the Inspector of Times Square. He's smart, honey, and he hasn't lost sight of me since I stepped out of Baldwin's office. I'm just bait. They've got me out on a string, just to see what happens."

"Then you shouldn't have phoned me." The worry in her voice wasn't for herself. I knew that, it was for me.

"I'd have been foolish if I'd done anything else," I told her. "They knew we were friends. If I avoided you now, if we made a point of not seeing each other, it would make them even more suspicious. But if you want my advice, you'll go back home and stay there."

She said, quickly. "Would that make it easier for you?"

I shook my head. "No, but I don't want you mixed up in this any more than need be. You weren't married to Lida. She was your agent, that's all. There's no need in dragging you into the muck. You've got your career to think of."

She snapped her fingers. "That for the career. I'm staying, Pete. I'm in this as much as you are. Whether you like it, or I like it doesn't make any difference. These things happen. You can't help yourself, but I should think the police, thinking you guilty, would be afraid you'd run away."

"They hope I will," I said. "Running would be the worst thing I could do. They'd have me on the teletype in fifteen minutes after Dan lost me. A man has no chance, running away."

THE trouble was, I didn't know how to fight. I let Genny leave the restaurant first and waited until she was out of sight before I stood up and moved toward the door. At Dan Topper's table I paused. "I'm going over to the office, Dan. You might as well share the cab."

He looked up, but didn't move. "Nuts to you, killer," he said in a voice that barely reached my ears.

I felt the red come up to my face. I felt my fists clench at my sides. But I knew he was purposely trying to anger me, and I didn't mean to let him. "Have it your way," I said. "If you'd rather stand on a cold street than sit around in a comfortable chair, that's your business." I went out, feeling that everyone in the restaurant was staring at me, caught a cab and gave the office address.

It was late, almost six, but everyone was still there. Lida had never opened the place until noon and usually closed anywhere from seven to eight. Her clients weren't the kind of people who got up before luncheon.

Katie, the blonde receptionist, let out a little squeal when she saw me. I suppose she thought

I'd already be decorating the end of a rope. Jenson, Lida's fifty-year-old secretary, greeted me as I stepped into the inner office, but we'd never liked each other and her manner showed plainly that I was tried and convicted in her mind.

I had an office of my own, a cubbyhole which I almost never used. I didn't turn towards it now, but headed straight for the big room which had been Lida's.

Jenson started to rise from her own desk as if to bar my way, thought better of it and settled back. "The studio called and said they were replacing you with a temporary substitute." There was malice in her tone.

I nodded. I had expected that. The broadcasting company and the sponsor could hardly afford me on the air, especially until the publicity blew over, if it ever would.

I went on, pushing open Lida's door, surprised that the lights were burning within the big room. Then I saw why, and a wave of sudden anger swept over me. Tony Mahone was seated in Lida's chair, calmly going through the drawers of her desk.

I never realized until that moment that I had hated this man, and his quiet assumption of authority in going through Lida's desk was more than I could stand. Before he realized I was in the room, I had crossed it, reached over the desk and, grasping the lapels of his

coat, jerked him to his feet. He stared at me.

"Get out of here before I throw you out!"

"Why Peter, I—"

"Get out!" my voice was trembling. "Get out before I kill you."

"He means it," said a voice from the right. It was the first indication I had that we were not alone. I swung around to see Dick Frost lounging beside the window.

Frost was a short man, with a thick, barrel-like body and powerful arms. His face was round, his hair and eyebrows sandy.

He grinned now. "Take it easy, Pete. Don't go haywire on us."

I let go of Mahone's lapels and stepped back, finding that my hands were shaking slightly from the rage which burned through me. I was still angry, but somehow Frost's presence, his ready grin, blunted my rage.

"Sorry," I muttered, without meaning it. "I just—I've had a devil of a day."

Mahone straightened his coat. He didn't seem to be put out by my violence, and nothing ever seemed to crack his cynical calm.

"That's okay. I imagine it was something of a shock to walk in here and find me calmly going through Lida's things. But we thought you were still in the hands of the police, and someone had to do it."

"Do what?" The anger had all drained out of me now, leaving me empty and ill at ease.

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"Search her desk," said Mahone. "The cops have already been through it, but since they might not have known what they were looking for, they might not find it."

I borrowed a cigarette from Dick Frost and used the pause it took to light it to pull myself together. "And what were they looking for?" I asked.

I saw Mahone throw a quick glance toward Frost; then he said to me, "I guess you were about the only one in the world who didn't know it, but our friend Lida was one of the most accomplished little blackmailers who ever lived."

"NO," HE held up his hand as I tried to speak. "Wait a minute, Sheaffer. You don't like me, and I can't say that I've ever been really fond of you, but we're in this thing together whether we like it or not."

"But . . ."

"She wasn't a blackmailer in the ordinary sense," he went on. "She knew a lot of things about a lot of people, things that they wouldn't want told. Remember, she grew up in show business, and she was smart. The boys around the Rialto knew that if they had the dirt on someone, Lida would pay money for it, good money. Didn't it ever occur to you to wonder how she managed some of the deals she put over, that she had to know where the bodies were buried, or she wouldn't have gotten away with the things she did."

His words made sense. I was seeing things that I had never really understood before, seeing a new Lida. I'd known she was hard, ruthless, but I'd thought she pushed through on her glitter, on her personal charm. This put an altogether new slant on many things.

"I guess I'm just dumb," I said.

"That's right," Dick Frost told me, "one of the dumbest bunnies that ever hit the stem."

Surprisingly Tony Mahone shook his head. "No you aren't," he said. "You were just so busy being a success, thinking about yourself, that you never bothered to think about much of anything else; and Lida made darn certain that you didn't find out. I don't blame you if you did kill her."

I looked at him, startled. "I thought you loved her?"

"For ten years," he said, his mouth twisting. "I loved her and I think at times I hated her. One thing about Lida, she inspired emotion of some kind. You couldn't ignore her."

I asked something that had bothered me for a long time. "Why didn't you marry her?"

"I was too smart," he said. "Lida was possessive. She had to control people, body and soul. I couldn't play the game that way—and yet, I couldn't stay entirely away from her. I compromised by being her attorney. I saw

more of her than almost anyone else, and I think I'm the one person whose opinion she respected. If we'd been married, that wouldn't have been true."

I knew he was telling the truth. Strange, I was seeing things in their proper perspective for the first time since I'd walked into her office. I went over and sank onto a window seat.

"All right, I'll assume for the moment you didn't kill her. Genny says that something Lida dropped led her to believe that you were going back to the penthouse late last night. Did you go?"

For the barest fraction of an instant he hesitated. The hesitation wouldn't have been noticeable if I hadn't been watching him closely. Then he nodded. "I went back," he said. "Lida sent me out to look for you. She was really burned when you walked out. I think it was the first time you'd ever crossed her."

I nodded.

"She called Genny," he went on, "and told her to come over. She didn't really want to see Genny. All she wanted was to make certain that you hadn't gone over there. Then she sent me out. I tried every place I could think of. Several hotel clerks said you'd been there, trying to get a room, but I couldn't locate you."

"I was at a Turkish bath."

He snapped his fingers and I got the impression that he was angry at himself. "I should have thought of that. But I didn't. I finally went back to the penthouse to report. I didn't like the idea of going. I knew Lida would be furious, and unpleasant. I meant to tell her off. I'd had about enough."

"Did you?"

He shook his head. "I didn't. She was already dead. I don't know why I tell you this. I didn't tell the police and if you give them the story, it's not going to put me in a good light, but, well, I guess you have a right to know."

"That's one for the book," Dick Frost said. "Tony Mahone goes soft."

Color darkened Mahone's face. He swung to say something to the press agent, then checked himself and added to me, "You and Genny are in a tough spot. Anything that will help—"

"Let's keep her out of this."

Dick Frost laughed. "You've got a fat chance of doing that. Dan Topper and Baldwin already have her slated for the big act. It makes better copy that way."

I turned on him angrily. "Don't you ever think of anything but headlines?"

"What else is there?" He drew a pipe from his pocket and began to fill it. I looked at him for a long moment, thinking that the only man in town that I really trusted was deserting me, then I turned back to Mahone.

"Tony," I said. "You knew Lida a lot longer than I did. Tell me something. What made her love silver fox fur so much? Maybe if we knew that, and knew who knew it, it might be a clue. The murderer wrapped her furs about her throat after he finished choking her."

Mahone's face got a strained look. "I'm afraid that won't help you," he said, the words coming out in a kind of rush. "You see, Pete, I put those furs around her throat. She was lying there—dead." His voice broke a little at the word and I saw him shiver, then recover himself. "She looked so alone, so cold, and the furs were on the couch. I took them and put them around her."

The silence in the office was a heavy, solid thing. None of us felt like speaking. Dick Frost was the first to recover and he spoke in a different tone than I'd ever heard him use.

"Well, chumps. Where do we go from here? We were Lida's boys. Going to try and carry on the office, Pete? I suppose it belongs to you."

I hadn't thought about that angle. The office and all it represented was mine, but I didn't want it. I said, "I couldn't carry on if I wanted to. I don't know the angles. I'm no salesman, and most of the clients didn't like me, they resented me."

Dick said, "You're smarter than I thought."

"Mahone can carry on if he wants to." I glanced toward the lawyer. "He's been running the business end for years, anyway. Why don't you two combine? I'll turn the works over to you."

They looked at each other. Mahone cleared his throat. "There's an angle you haven't thought of, maybe. I said Lida was a black-mailer. She had her secret file, and maybe some of the boys who are on it are going to want to make certain that the information she had doesn't pass into the wrong hands."

"But this file, where is it?"

He hesitated for an instant. "In my office. I shouldn't tell you this I suppose. It would be better if I burned the cards and let it go at that. I'm telling you for a reason. You're going to be approached in the next twenty-four hours by a number of characters. They'll all conclude that you inherited the file. It wasn't fair for you not to know what they are talking about." He broke off, again hesitating, then he drew an automatic from his coat pocket. "Ever use one of these?"

I was surprised. "Why yes, but—"

He said, "Take it. Some of the boys Lida dealt with were rough characters. They might try and get rough with you."

I took the gun and said, "Maybe one of them killed her. Maybe if we went through the list it would give us a lead."

Mahone shrugged. "There are over a thousand cards in that file—a lot of suspects, if you ask me. Even Dan Topper couldn't sort them out. However, the file is yours if you want it."

"Why yes," I said. "I want it. A lot of the names can come off. We can check. They wouldn't be in town and—"



I did not know there was anyone in the room until the blow fell with sickening force.

"They could hire it done," Mahone told me. "However, come on, we'll take a look, anyhow."

CHAPTER THREE

Blood Bait

A THOUSAND file cards aren't so many. Lida had arranged them carefully and the notations were in her slanting script. Evidently she hadn't wanted them seen even by a typist. I borrowed a brief case from Mahone and carted them back to the penthouse conscious that Dan Topper was staying with me.

I thought that, although they did not know it, the police were furnishing me with a body guard. I might need one before the night was over. I wanted Mahone to come, but he shook his head.

"I wouldn't do you any good, and I don't want any part of it. I only stood for the file because of Lida."

"Scared?" I said, without meaning what he read into it.

His eyes grew smoky. Then he nodded. "Frankly, yes. Men are on that list who have killed before and might well kill again. Lida

overlooked few bets. The best thing is to burn it."

"But you've been over it," I said. "You know what is on some of the cards?"

His tone had an unwilling note. "Yes, I've been over it. I know what is on some cards."

"Would some be missing?"

He looked at me sharply. "What do you mean by that?"

"The murderer might have stolen his own card," I pointed out. "Who besides Lida knew that these things were kept in your office, not hers?"

"No one."

"Then the murderer's card is still in this bunch," I told him. "By the way, is your name on this list?"

I thought for an instant that he would hit me. He controlled himself with a visible effort and said tensely, "What do you mean by that, Pete?"

I shrugged. "Only that I'm learning fast. From what I've learned and from knowing her, I can't think that my darling wife would trust anyone unless she had the deadwood on them."

He laughed. It was a short, sharp, bitter sound. "You're right," he said. "But Lida would not keep the card referring to me where I could lay my hands on it. You won't find it there. I don't know where she kept it."

"You might have killed her for it."

He nodded. "I might have, any time during the last ten years."

I picked up the brief case and turned to where Dick Frost stood, watching us. "I think you're a friend of mine. Do you want to help?"

He grinned. "I might help at that, if the job wasn't too tough a one."

I said, "All I want you to do is to circulate around the district, the drug store where all the boys hang out, the night spots, drop a word here and there. Just say that I have Lida's list. It won't mean a thing to the ones who aren't on it. The ones who are will know what you're talking about."

"Can do."

Mahone said, "You are a fool, Sheaffer. You're making a clay pigeon of yourself. You're making a bid for someone to kill you."

I shrugged. "I might as well be murdered as have the state kill me for a murderer. Death is the same no matter how it comes." I picked up the brief case and moved toward the door.

"Coming, Dick?"

He grinned at me. "Righto. I've published a lot of things, but this is the first blackmail list I ever press agented. I hope it does you some good, although I doubt it."

There was no cab in sight and the night was clear. "Think I'll walk."

He raised a hand. "Be seeing you. I go

the other way." I watched him swing off down the street, whistling softly to himself. If Lida's death affected him, he gave no sign.

I WALKED along, trying to think. After a block I opened the case and started to glance through the cards. Some of the names listed and the information contained made me catch my breath. If that list were published, it certainly would make juicy reading.

I was surprised to find Genny listed. There wasn't anything startling about her, her date of birth, parents' names, schools, jobs. Lida had certainly been thorough.

A curious, dispassionate anger flowed through me as I found a card with my name on it. Lida must have hired detectives to get the information. Even the three nights I'd spent in jail during my senior year at college were listed.

I passed a hotel, retraced my steps and went into the writing room. Seated at the little desk, I saw Dan Topper pass the door twice and grinned sourly to myself. My actions must have been confusing to anyone trailing me. Then the grin died as the nameless fear took hold of me again. Topper was the law, the law that should have been my protection and was, instead, my antagonist.

I left the hotel and saw that Topper followed me. He made no effort at concealment, yet he stayed almost half a block behind. He followed grimly and it might have been humorous, this dogged pursuit, had it not been that my nerves were jumpy, on edge, so that I was almost doubting my own innocence.

The automatic elevator which led to the penthouses was reached by a small side corridor from the main lobby. It could also be reached from the street, if you knew the way, and I came in through this side entrance, not feeling like facing the crowded lobby. There was no attendant in the small corridor and I pushed the button and waited impatiently until the car came down.

I got in hurriedly and pushed the button marked ROOF. The door closed itself and the car started upward. Even in the small elevator I had the feeling that someone was watching me, waiting behind some hidden corner to spring out at me.

I didn't know what I would find upstairs. The police might have left a guard in the apartment, or the hotel management might have stationed a bellboy there to prevent curiosity seekers. The car came to a halt with a slight jar, the door slid open. I stepped out into the small hall which served the three penthouses.

On the other side of this hall was the public elevator, one shaft of which rose from the lobby and which most guests used. Beyond it

was a stairway with a steel fire door. I stared at this stairway. I'd forgotten its existence since we had never used it, but the murderer could have come that way.

I crossed the hall, fitted my key into the lock, opened the door and stepped into the penthouse. It was quiet inside. I hadn't expected it to be anything else. The maid came in by the day and left at six. If we wanted anything after that we called room service. I turned on the foyer lights, looking around the small hall; then I flipped my hat onto the small hall table, recalling as I did so that Lida had never allowed me to leave it there. It was curious, but the only things I remembered about Lida were the prohibitions she had set up. I never remembered her complimenting me for anything, and I thought bitterly, *I'm glad she's dead. I should feel sorry about it, but I'm no hypocrite, I don't feel sorry. . . .*

I shook myself, as a dog might, trying to rid my mind of Lida. It seemed that she haunted me worse now than she ever had alive. Everything I saw reminded me of her, everything I touched. . . .

I walked into the long living room, still carrying the brief case, but I didn't turn on the lights. I went over to the window and stood looking down at the street, far below.

I heard nothing behind me. I did not know there was anyone else within the room until the blow fell. It came against the back of my head with sickening force. I thought, even as I fell, that it was a sap, a sandbag, something soft and giving and yet deadly.

I wasn't out. Why I wasn't I don't know, for the force of the blow had stunned my nerve centers and made it impossible for me to move.

Nor was I fully conscious, for I knew only vaguely that someone had stooped, caught up the brief case and was carrying it into the foyer.

HOW long I lay there, I'll never know. Probably it was for seconds only, maybe for minutes. I came to my full senses to find that I was on my hands and knees, trying to get up. The noise in the foyer seemed to be continuing. I was certain I heard the door close.

I struggled to my feet, grasping the heavy window drape for momentary support. Then I felt in my coat pocket for the gun Mahone had given me. It was still there, and I took it out. I just had sense enough to slip the safety before I started across the room.

Then I heard a movement in the foyer. Whoever it was had not gone. I hurried, although my legs seemed to be made out of a curious rubbery substance which was not quite firm. I reached the connecting door, stepped through it, my gun raised.

"Hands up."

I poked the gun almost directly into Genny Austin's face.

She gasped, and I almost dropped the gun. "Genny, where did you come from? What are you doing here?"

She was staring at me, at the gun which I held, clenched in my hand. Beyond her I saw Mahone's brief case, a little to the right, leaning against the hall wall, its straps fastened.

"Pete, what's the matter? What's happened? What are you doing with that gun?"

I looked at the automatic stupidly for a moment, as if I'd never seen it before, then I slid the safety into place and put the gun in my pocket.

"How long have you been here?"

"Why, I—I just came in. I knocked and no one answered. I thought that strange since I could see the light from the crack under the door. So, I tried the knob. The door was unlocked and I came in."

I stood there, watching her, trying to decide whether or not she was telling the truth. I saw the worry in her eyes, heard her say, "But you, something's happened. You're acting strangely."

"I've been hit on the head," I told her. "Someone was waiting for me in the darkened living room when I came in."

"But, what did they—who was it?"

"I don't know yet," I said, picking up the brief case. I carried it back into the living room and turned up the lights. "You shouldn't have come here."

"I know it," she said, watching me as I ran through the cards, "but I couldn't help it, Pete. I—I had to see you, to talk to you, to know you were all right."

I wanted to believe her—and yet. . . . "Did you see anyone as you came up, anyone who might have been leaving here?"

She shook her head. "Why should anyone want to break in here to knock you out?"

"For these cards," I said.

She stared at them, her eyes wide. "What are they?"

I hadn't intended to tell her, but I did. "You see," I finished, "Lida used the knowledge she had accumulated about people to force them to do what she wished. I remember last winter when she put on that play by those Hollywood writers, I thought it funny that two of the town's biggest gamblers would put up the money. Let's see," I ran through the cards and I could feel my face burn. "They're here all right. One of them is an escaped convict, the other—" I broke off for I'd heard sound from the room behind me and I was pretty certain that Genny hadn't made any noise.

He was standing in the doorway, watching me, a man about forty, black-haired, with a dark, oval face and too full lips.

I felt my face muscles go stiff, for I knew

him. Most people who make the night clubs their habit knew Connie Snyder, and no one seemed to know exactly what he did, but he could be here for one reason and one only—his name must be on one of Lida's cards.

I managed to twist my lips into a smile. "Hello, there. Nice of you to knock."

He didn't answer. He stepped into the room and another man came in after him. This man was tall and thin. He was so thin that the bony framework of his face stood out against the skin, making him look like a living skeleton. "This the guy, Connie?"

Snyder nodded. He'd thrown one look at Genny, then turned his full attention on me. "Evening, Pete."

Something very cold seemed to be clawing its way slowly up my back. I didn't like Snyder. I'd never liked him, but up until this moment he'd been of no importance to me. He was now. He was here for something, and how he'd act in getting it was of the utmost importance to me, to me and Genny. For an instant I'd forgotten her presence. I wished fervently that she were somewhere else.

"Sorry to hear about Lida." Snyder was lipping his words. There was no meaning in them. He might have remarked about the weather. "Understand you have a list she was keeping?"

I nodded, dumbly and his eyes fell on the cards. I could see his face tighten. "At least," he said, "Lida didn't talk in the wrong places, not when she was taken care of."

I wanted to tell him that I wouldn't talk either, that I had no interest in what he had done or what he meant to do in the future. All I wanted was to have him leave Genny and me alone. And then I thought of the purpose of bringing the file here. It was to be used for bait, to draw the murderer to me.

I looked at Connie Snyder, at his slender hands, trying to picture him as the man who had killed Lida.

I DIDN'T doubt that he would kill if it served his purpose—that he had killed in the past—but had he killed Lida? For some reason I couldn't picture him choking her. The gun would be more his style, and if he could hire it done, I doubted that he would use the gun himself.

For all his arrogance there was a careful streak in the man. He was a sure-thing player, not a real gambler. For this reason I said, quickly. "I've got the list here. I was just going to look it over."

He gave me a stare. "Meaning you've never seen it?"

My mouth felt a little dry as if it were filled with cotton. "That's right. There's a card with my name on it in that list, the same as yours."

"I thought you said you hadn't looked. How d'you know my name is on Lida's list if you haven't looked?"

"Would you be here if it wasn't?"

"I might," he said, and grinned at me thinly. "Didn't it ever occur to you, Junior, that that list might be valuable to a guy who knew how to use it right?"

That was an angle I hadn't thought of, an angle I didn't like. I wasn't going to use Lida's list myself and I certainly didn't mean to turn it over to a sharper like Connie Snyder to blackmail Broadway with.

I said, "Now, look. I don't want any trouble with you, Connie, and I don't want any trouble with anyone else. I was going to use this list to try and find Lida's murderer. After that, I'm going to burn it."

"You kill me," he said, and he wasn't smiling. "You bumped your wife yourself. Everyone in town knows it. Quit stalling and hand over those cards."

I shrugged. "Help yourself. There isn't much I can do to stop you."

He moved forward and gathered up the cards, turning to look at me speculatively. "If I thought you'd looked them over—"

"Sure he has," said the skeleton man. "Don't trust him, boss. Both him and the dame know too much."

Connie said, "We gotta be careful. Dan Topper is downstairs, and there may be other flatfeet hanging around."

His gunman sneered. "So what? Look, we can bump him and the dame. Topper will figure that he got scared of the police, knocked over the broad and then gunned himself—a cinch." He was watching me with glittering, deep-set eyes.

I wondered if I could get the automatic from my pocket. I was pretty certain I couldn't before he shot me. His hand was on his gun, although it wasn't in sight.

It was Genny who surprised them, and me. She'd been standing perfectly quiet, without a word, her hands at her sides, one clutching her purse. Suddenly I noticed the purse was open.

She raised her other hand now and there was a gun in it. It was the smallest gun I've ever seen, but still a gun.

"Put your hands up," she told the skeleton man. "You too," she swung the gun a little, so that it covered Connie Snyder.

He swung away from me to face her. "Drop that pop-gun, sister, or I'll feed it to you." He took a step toward her.

"But not this one," I said, and brought Mahone's automatic into sight. "Hold it, Connie, I'd love to put a bullet into your back."

He stopped, turned and slowly raised his hands, his thin lips curving a little. "Well, well, Percy comes to life."

My voice sounded harsh, even in my own ears. "I said I didn't want any trouble with you. I don't, but you butted into this. You're in and you're going to stay here. Turn around."

He turned and I got the gun from under his arm. Then I did the same for the skeleton man and, after that, told the girl: "There's tape in the bathroom. Get it, will you."

She got it, helped me fasten their wrists and ankles. When that was done I said: "I didn't know you were a gungirl?"

"I'm not," her voice was shaking a little. "My father gave me that when I came to New York. He had the idea that there was danger in a big city. I've always carried it, but—it wasn't even loaded."

Connie Snyder, bound securely in a chair, swore harshly. The skeleton man said nothing, but his deep-set eyes burned with an all-consuming hate.

"What are you going to do?" Genny was still trembling a little as she looked at the prisoners.

I shook my head. "I don't know," I told her. "First I want to see if Snyder is on that list." I turned and picked up the cards. He was there all right, so much there that Lida had utilized two cards to record his exploits. Rumrunner, bootlegger, numbers operator, and cigarette blackmarketeer. The card gave further information, source of his supply, warehouse location. . .

I began to think that the police had overlooked a bet in not hiring my wife. She seemed to have been able to secure information that apparently was beyond their grasp.

"Is he there?" The girl had walked over to my side.

I nodded and showed her the cards. "A fine, upstanding citizen. Now look, Genny, I'm going to leave you here with our friends. Frankly, I don't know what to do. I want to talk to Tony Mahone for one thing."

She stared at me, wide-eyed. "Pete, is he tied up in this?"

"I don't know," I said. "That's what I

want to find out. He was the only one who had a key to this apartment, besides Lida and myself. Whoever was waiting to knock me out as I came in had a key. I want to ask Mahone about it."

CHAPTER FOUR

The Fatal Key

DAN TOPPER'S cab trailed mine to Mahone's apartment. I watched it, wondering what would happen if I were to stop Topper and tell him what I suspected. It seemed the sensible thing to do, but I knew, deep down, that I'd get the same answer I'd gotten in the restaurant earlier.

Nuts to you, killer. . .

In Dan Topper's eyes I was a murderer, squirming, trying to get out of the consequences of my crime, trying to throw the blame onto someone else.

The apartment was an old building in the Thirties, between Lexington and Third. I'd been there a couple of times and the old elevator man nodded.

"Mr. Mahone went up an hour and a half ago."

I nodded, stepped off at the fourth floor and knocked. Nothing happened and I knocked again, louder this time, my hand shaking a little, for I'd just thought of something. Still no response and I turned back toward the elevator, intending to get the old operator.

Then I stopped. Dan Topper was lurking somewhere out front. If what I feared was true, I'd be held, delayed. And Genny was alone in my apartment with Connie and his guns.

Instead, I turned toward the end of the hall. There was a big window at the side of Mahone's apartment, a window of which he was justly proud, which opened into a little, narrow balcony. I'd been out on this balcony. It was hardly bigger than a dining room table, but it was possible to reach it from the fire escape.

**TOPS
FOR
QUALITY!**



I slid up the window at the end of the hall and stepped out onto the iron grating. From the fire escape I could see that the lights were on inside the apartment. I stepped across to the little balcony and tried the window. It wasn't locked and I raised the wide sash.

The window seat inside was covered with potted plants. I got past them and stepped in. The room was empty. I stood for a moment looking uncertainly at the well-filled bookcases, then crossed to the hall which led back to the bedroom.

Mahone lay in the hall. He apparently had been trying to get away, realizing his danger, and hadn't made it. The bullet had caught him directly in the back, under the left shoulder blade. It had probably reached the heart. I wondered why the sound of the shot had attracted no one, and then I heard the rattle of the el, only a few lots distant. If the shot had come while a train were passing, certainly no one would have had to have noticed.

Much as I hated to, I stooped down and went through the lawyer's pockets, looking for his keys. They were there in a little leather folder, which I drew out and examined. The key to the penthouse was missing.

I stood for a long minute staring down at him. Certainly he had not survived Lida long. Their lives had been curiously linked and they were united now. Death was like that.

I turned away and moved to the outer door. It fastened on a night latch and I let myself out, the door locking automatically behind me.

When the elevator came up the old man said, "You didn't stay long."

"Guess he's not home," I said and stepped into the car.

"But he must be. I haven't taken him down. . ."

"Maybe he walked down," I said, "or maybe he was in bed and didn't want to be disturbed. I'll see him later." I left the building as hurriedly as I could and walked to Third Avenue.

I own that I was relieved when a cab came sliding between the el posts and drew to a stop at my signal. I'd been afraid that the old man might investigate, might raise a cry before I got out of the neighborhood.

I settled back and gave the address of my hotel in a voice loud enough to reach Dan Topper on the curb where he was looking up and down the street vainly for a cab—then I settled back and tried to think.

At the hotel the first person I saw was Dick Frost. He came forward to greet me in the little hall that led to the private elevator, his round face wearing a worried frown.

"Pete. Am I glad to see you! I couldn't figure what was going on."

I stared at him. "Going on? What are you talking about?"

He said, "I called the apartment and Genny answered. She wouldn't tell me why she was there or where you were, or anything. All she said was that I couldn't come up."

I stepped to the house phone at the side of the elevator and called the penthouse. "Genny, it's me, Pete. I'm coming up, everything okay?"

Her voice had a little tremor of relief. "Yes, everything's okay. Our guests are getting restless, come on."

I hung up and, motioning to Frost to follow, stepped into the little car, "I'm glad to see you," I told him. "Something's happened and I need advice. I went over to get it from Mahone. I didn't."

"Wasn't he there?"

"He was dead," I said. "Someone shot him in the back."

Dick swore under his breath. "Probably after Lida's list."

I hadn't thought of that and said so as the car stopped and I opened the door for him.

Genny met us at the penthouse entrance, her surprise showing at sight of Frost. "I thought you went for Mahone."

"He couldn't come," I told her. "In here, Dick. I want you to see our visitors. I want you to tell me what to do with them."

He followed me to the living room door and stopped, again swearing under his breath. "Connie!"

Snyder looked at us from his place in the chair. "Tell the fool to turn us loose, Frost. I'll see that he burns for this, plenty."

"The cops are trying to make me burn," I told him. "I'm afraid your efforts wouldn't get far compared with theirs."

"But what—" Frost was staring at me.

"He's on Lida's list," I said. "He came up here to do something about it. The question is what am I going to do with him?"

Frost said, slowly. "That will take some thinking, I—"

"Wait," I said. "You think about it. I want to see Genny for a minute." I pulled her after me into the foyer, lowering my voice.

WHEN I stepped back into the living-room door a couple of minutes later, Connie Snyder was stretching his arms and Frost was just releasing the skeleton man. Then Snyder had a gun in his hand and raised it so that it covered me.

"Come in, my friend. What was that you were saying about me not burning you?"

I stared at Frost who had straightened and was grinning at me crookedly. "The easiest way is to turn them loose, Pete."

"So I see," I told him.

The skeleton man said, suddenly. "Hey, where's the dame."

I looked at him. "I sent her home."

Snyder swore and took a quick step toward the door, then stopped as if he realized that it was impossible to head Genny off.

I said to Frost, "So, you couldn't bear to see your pals tied up."

He fumbled. "Or maybe," I said. "You mean to kill me—as you killed Mahone and Lida."

"Hey, wait," it was Connie Snyder who spoke. "We didn't kill your wife."

"I didn't say that you did," I told him. "I was talking to Frost. He choked Lida to death and he killed Mahone this evening."

Snyder turned to look at the press agent. Frost said, "He's crazy. Why would I want to kill Lida? Why should I bump off Tony?"

"Both for the same reason," I said. "Lida had your name on the list."

"You are crazy!"

"It isn't there now," I told him, "because you stole it, after you'd knocked me on the head. Let me guess at what you did tonight. You and I left Mahone's office together. I walked over here. You started out to spread the news that I had the list, only, you didn't. You went directly to Mahone's apartment, climbed the stairs and went in through the big window, the same way I did."

"You waited until he got home, which was almost at once, according to the time the elevator man said he arrived. He came in, saw you and guessed what you were doing there and started to run down the hall towards the bedroom. Maybe he had a second gun there—he'd given me the other."

"Anyhow, you shot him, because you knew he'd looked at the list and seen your name on the card; you searched him and got the key to this penthouse from his ring. You then came over here, intending, I think, to kill me and try and make it look like suicide. I hadn't gotten here yet, so, you hid, knocked me out and stole your file card. Why you didn't take the whole file, I'll never know. Probably afraid that Topper or some other cop might spot you in the hotel and pick you up for questioning. But you wanted the file, for you'd concluded that in the right hands, that list could be very valuable, so, you sent Snyder and his gunman after it."

Frost said, not speaking to me. "He's crazy, Connie. Even if there had been a card, why should I have chosen last night to kill Lida?"

I said, "I'll tell you why, and I can prove there was a card. You see, Dick, I figured that anyone who Lida worked with would be on that list. I was curious about you, since I thought you were the one man I could trust. I stopped in a hotel on the way over here and looked at your card. You knifed a man in a newspaper brawl in Fort Worth in nineteen twenty-four, but that wasn't the important thing. The card said that you've been peddling

black market cigarettes for our friend here. It worked in well with your publicity contacts.

"And I know Lida. She wouldn't have stood for it, not because of patriotic reasons alone, but from her angle you were jeopardizing her business. So, she called up and told you to come over last night. You argued, you lost your head, and you killed her."

Snyder swore. Frost said stubbornly, "You still can't prove any of this."

I nodded. "Yes I can. You see, Dick, when I read what was on your card, I had a hunch. There in the hotel writing room, I copied the card, faking Lida's writing. The copy I put back in the file, and it was that you lifted, the other is hidden in the desk of that writing room."

"What hotel?"

The words came out before he thought and Snyder laughed.

"So, you're a killer."

From the foyer Dan Topper stepped into the room, reinforced by two of the hotel's staff. "Watch it, Frost."

Dick Frost ignored the warning. He must have known what was coming, but he tried to raise his gun. Topper shot him twice, then swung to cover Connie Snyder and the skeleton man. "Want any?"

Connie Snyder spread his hand. "You've got nothing on us, copper, we didn't help that rat strangle Lida. Her husband will tell you."

I said, "Yeah, but we'll send you away for this cigarette thing, and you were fixing to kill both me and Genny."

"You can't shoot a guy for trying," Connie Snyder said.

Topper growled and I could tell he'd have loved to squeeze the trigger. He didn't. The police are well disciplined.

Later Genny said. "But when you brought him up in the elevator, you knew he was guilty. Otherwise you wouldn't have sent me back downstairs to get Topper."

I nodded. "That's right, but I had no real proof that he'd killed Lida. I had the card from her file, and I was morally certain he'd killed Mahone and stolen the penthouse key, but that still didn't prove the murder. I had to get him to give himself away. I didn't want you there when it happened and I did want Topper to walk in, so I sent you after him."

She nodded. "I'm glad it's over. Poor Lida, she didn't need that list. She had a lot of ability, a lot..."

"A lot," I said. "Too much for me, I guess."

Genny said, "I'm going home tomorrow. I don't think I like New York."

"It isn't New York," I told her. "It's just that we got tied up in something. Don't forget to let me have the address before you go. I might write you a letter sometime."

She didn't forget.

THE FOOL'S PAWN

By Francis K. Allan



Joe did not think—he only felt his fist smash into flesh and bone.

There was just one bedtime story Joe knew—the tale of a misspent life—and the night he told it to his boy was one which might have no tomorrow!

DARK figures hurried through the driving sleet toward the subway entrances of Times Square. Cabs picked their way cautiously, their tires crunching on the ice-veneered pavements. Broadway was desolate and wind-swept.

A thin man, his lips blue from the cold, stopped beneath the lighted marquee of a picture show. His coat was thin and worn, his hat cheap. His face bore an expression of hunger, of age that was older than his years. His stony brown eyes stared at a poster that announced the current attraction: *Castle in The Air*, starring Kit Marshall, juvenile sensation, with George Roberts and Susan Hughes.

The man's fingers opened and closed in his pockets. He looked at the clock above the ticket booth. It was eight-ten. Slowly he turned. The needles of sleet stung against his thin cheeks.

It was eight-thirty when he stopped before

the ornate old brick mansion in the upper fifties just off Madison. The two top floors of the house were dark, save for a dim glow at a front window. The large bay-windows of a main floor room were brilliant with lights that glistened from behind long drapes. To the left of the house was a narrow alley. Silently the man tiptoed into the alley.

He fitted a key to the darkened rear door and entered the kitchen. The house was warm, serene with the atmosphere of an ordered pattern of living. A piano tinkled in the front room.

The man used the narrow rear stairs to reach the second floor. Gradually the music faded—the wide upper hall was still. A door opened to his touch. A light burned softly in this room—a bedroom whose walls were brightly papered in animal designs. On the floor was an electric train, the track forming a figure eight. In the bed a child was sleeping—a boy of eight, with almost ivory skin and hair of dark brown.

The man closed the door and crept to the bed. From his pocket he took a small bottle. As he removed the cap, an odor of penetrating sweetness rose. His fingers trembled as they moved the bottle toward the child's nostrils.

THE other room was large and cold with a musty, damp coldness. A window kept rattling as the wind drove sleet against the pane. There were no curtains, no rug on the floor. On the cot-like bed were dirty quilts. There were two straight chairs, one stacked with newspapers and hung with a dirty blue shirt and a grey tie. A small round table held an overflowing ashtray, a bottle opener, and a row of empty beer bottles. One corner of the room was crossed with a rod from which hung a limp summer suit and a listless tuxedo. A violin case leaned against the wall below them. There was a one-burner grill. Above it was a wooden shelf holding salt, canned milk, coffee, spaghetti, and a pan of oatmeal.

The thin man with the hungry face stood in the center of this room. His coat was still on, but his hat was off, revealing his thinning brown hair. His eyes were fixed on the cot. Beneath the frayed and dirty quilts slept the child.

A roar grew out of the distance, reached a rumbling crescendo that vibrated the room, then faded away again. It was the Third Avenue elevated, passing less than ten feet outside. With the sound, the child opened his brown eyes. He saw the thin man. He blinked.

"Hello." His voice was sleepy, yet calm. "Who are you?"

"Call me Joe," the man said.

"Just Joe? You don't have any other names?"

"Joe's enough." The man fingered his tie. He hunted for a cigarette. The child sat up and looked around the room. He frowned slightly.

"Do you live here?"

"Sometimes." He found his eyes following the child's.

"It's cold. Why don't they turn up the furnace?"

"There ain't any furnace. This is a cold water flat from scratch."

"Isn't any furnace, Joe," the boy corrected calmly. Again he frowned as he studied Joe's clothes. "Did mother send me here?"

"I—yeah. You see, I'm—well, I'm going to give you some tips on being a poor kid, see? In your next picture, you'll be living in a place like this. But you need the feel of it, see?"

"Oh. Then you know my name and everything?"

"Sure, I know. You're Kit Marshall."

"It's funny, but I keep thinking I've seen you somewhere, Joe."

"No." The word was flat. "And I never saw you, Kit." Joe turned abruptly and lifted a quart of beer from the corner. "Maybe you're hungry?" he asked suddenly. "You want anything? Oatmeal?"

"Oh, no, thank you. I had my dinner at grandmother's."

Joe stood still a moment, just looking at Kit. He seemed on the verge of speaking. Then he opened the bottle and filled a glass. He sat down at the table. Kit rubbed his forehead. "I feel awful light inside," he murmured. "Kind of a funny feeling."

Joe shifted uncomfortably. "You better go to sleep. It's late."

"I'm not sleepy, really. It is a little cold, but. . . . Do you play a violin, sir?" he asked suddenly.

Joe turned abruptly and looked at the case. "Oh. No, I . . . once, a little. Not any more," he said dryly. "And don't call me sir."

"My father played the violin. My mother told me so."

"Yeah?" Joe lowered the glass. "Was he—any good?"

"Mother said he was very good. I never saw him, you see."

"I don't suppose—" Joe hesitated. "Did she say anything else?"

"She doesn't talk about him. Only once I remember she said something kind of funny—something about, 'A fool and his pride are blind.' She never did say what she meant."

Joe stared at the child's curly hair. Abruptly he drained the glass of beer. "You better be turning in, Kit," he said shortly. His face was suddenly more tired. His eyes

were restless and dark—and a little fearful. "Yes, sir—Joe." The boy slipped under the covers. For a time he gazed at the ceiling. Presently his eyes closed.

Joe stood up and moved to the window. He tried to jam it so it wouldn't rattle; the sound was rasping his nerves. He looked at the room. For some reason—he scarcely thought—he cleaned the chair of newspapers and picked up the dirty shirt. He mopped the table top with his handkerchief. He caught himself. "The hell with it," he exclaimed.

A KNOCK sounded at the door. Instantly Joe turned and silently crossed the room. He unlocked the door. On the small unlighted landing stood a top-heavy, florid-faced man. He wore a pearl grey overcoat and homburg. A pin glistened in his red tie; an emerald gleamed on his finger. His shoulders were wide and pillowlike. His mustache was neat and yellow. His eyes were a smoky blue, and they roamed beyond Joe and into the lighted room.

"You got him?" There was no warmth, scarcely a tone in the words.

"I got him. He's asleep, Selman," Joe answered stonily.

"You asked for ten grand?" Selman wondered. Joe nodded. Selman's lips quirked. "You're a damn fool. You could have made it fifty."

"I just owe you ten," Joe answered wearily.

"But you'll be wanting dough again. And your tab is off, Joe. I don't like hard collections. I don't like sticking out my neck." Again he glanced into the room. "The ten grand will be at my place by seven in the morning?"

"That's what I told you," Joe said harshly. His fingers gnawed at his hot moist palms. "Hell, if you don't like this, why don't you get out?"

He watched Selman's lips form a slight smile; then the fat man turned, vanished down the darkness of the stairs. Joe closed the door and leaned against it. He closed his eyes, trembling. He paced the room, and pushed his fingers through his hair. The wind rattled the window and he jerked and cursed softly.

He went to the window and grasped the frame, clenched it savagely. Sweat poured from his cheeks. His breath came hard and fast. Presently he relaxed a little and stared into the sleet-filled darkness.

It's not going to work, he thought. I should have known all along. The kid will talk. You can't pressure kids. Some day. . . He clamped his jaw his fists clenched.

"It's got to work!" he whispered aloud. "It will, if Cynthia handles it . . . if the old lady doesn't get her hand in! Cynthia will hush

it. It'd be too big a stink! The papers . . . and, God, it's only ten grand," he argued. "The kid makes 'em a hundred grand. I've got some coming. . ."

"Who were you talking to, Joe?"

Kit's sleepy voice jerked Joe around violently. "You're supposed to be asleep! I told you to go to sleep!"

"I—but I—" the kid stammered, his eyes widening. "I thought I heard you saying Cynthia, so I thought mother was here and—"

"Well, she ain't—isn't. Why don't you plain go to sleep?"

"I keep getting cold and—" Kit hesitated—"maybe if you'd lie down too—" He left the request unfinished.

Joe started to answer. Then he sighed. "Okay. Crawl over."

He turned out the light. He settled himself clumsily on the narrow cot. As he lay there he became aware of the clean scent of soap that came from the child. And he smelled the dirt of the quilts.

"Maybe you know some stories, Joe?" Kit suggested softly.

"Oh, hell, no. I don't . . . no, Kit," he corrected. "Still cold?"

"Not very, any more." There was a silence. "Not even one story?"

Joe frowned at the dark ceiling. "Not any good stories." He could feel the child waiting. He swallowed and tried to think. The silence and darkness began to press down on his chest. He found himself yearning to talk, to break the solitude of thought.

"There was a story once," he said slowly. "A story about a guy that played a fiddle in an orchestra. Once the outfit was here in New York, playing at an East Side hotel. The guy. . . First he started watching a girl that came there dancing." Joe stopped and felt for a cigarette. The pack was empty.

"What kind of girl?"

"Different. You don't get that," Joe said. "The guy didn't either, then. He wasn't smart: he wasn't ever smart. This girl was beautiful in a way that had to grow on you—quiet and soft. If you weren't very smart you didn't see it right away. I don't guess you ever noticed moonlight on water. It's something you can't ever hold in your hand. That was the way with her. She wasn't very big—just about to the shoulder of a guy like me, with hair like gold. She was shy, too."

"Well, anyway, the guy said hello to her a few times and she said hello back. Once they had a martini at intermission. She said she'd meet him. It—oh, it was crazy, sure, but they were too young to be smart. Anyway, they got married, not letting anybody know. It couldn't work. It didn't."

"That isn't all?" Kit asked wonderingly.

"The rest is just downhill. I mean, nothing

much happened. For a while the girl followed the guy when he went with the band, but it was tough. Then after a while she—she got sick. He quit the band. They came back here to her mother's. Her dad was dead. That was the last round. The old—her mother had never liked the guy; he was just a band-bum to her, and she'd had a lot of plans. They didn't fit together at all, and the girl was so young that. . . . Well, one night the guy drifted out and never went back. He didn't have any money, and—that's the story," Joe said abruptly.

"That's *really* all? They didn't see each other *ever* again?"

"No. The guy got to drinking a little, then more. For a while he'd be in a band, but he was always drifting back to New York. For a while he played around little spots in Greenwich Village. Finally he even quit that. He didn't have much on the ball. He got to playing the races. He'd shoot dice some, and. . . . Well, in a little while he went to hell." Joe stopped. "That's all. Now you go to sleep," he said almost bluntly.

The silence deepened in the darkness. "It's funny, sort of," Kit said softly. "You don't sound like you look, when the light's off, Joe." The elevated train thundered by. The beer bottles rattled and the window danced. "Mother has hair like you said," Kit murmured sleepily. "Just like that."

Joe kept watching the dark ceiling. When Kit's breathing became regular, Joe slipped from the cot and found his hat. He tiptoed out, locking the door.

A block from his room, he entered a crowded, talk-filled bar. He closed himself in the telephone booth and dialed a number. He held his handkerchief over his mouth.

"Yes? Hello? Hello?" The answering voice was swift, breathless.

"You got the note. You'll pay the ten thousand dollars?"

"Oh, I will! You know I will," the voice choked. "He's all right, isn't he? Swear he's not hurt, please."

"He's okay. And you haven't called in the police?"

"No, I promise. I didn't. I did just as your note said. I—" Joe could hear her swallowing. "Please, I don't know who you are, but please, I beg of you, take care of him. He's not well. He's been ill, very ill. Influenza, and it's so cold. Please take care of him. I'll do anything you say. I'll follow all the instructions."

"He'll be okay. You know the time and place. That's all. . . ." Joe lifted the receiver. His fingers hesitated. His lips reached after words that remained unspoken. He hung up. He sat there a full minute without moving. At last he wiped his damp forehead. In him was a cold desolation that gnawed at him like an illness.

Then he went out.

JOE closed the door of the room behind him. In the darkness he heard Kit's breath—swift and shallow. He snapped on the light and moved silently to the bed. The child's ivory skin was faintly flushed at the cheekbones. A mist of perspiration covered his forehead. Joe tucked the quilts more closely about the small shoulders. Kit stirred and murmured in his sleep. When he was quiet again, Joe sat down at the table. He salvaged a cigarette stub from the ashtray and lit it. He dug a stub of pencil from his pocket. He used a ten cent notebook sheet. He frowned as he began to write:

Cynthia,

When you read this you'll know, even if you can't understand. I had to have the money. I owe it to a man—the kind of a man who must be paid. I got that much in debt because one time I. . . .

Joe stopped and wiped his hands against his pants. He stared at the words. He gripped the pencil again. His face was ashen.

. . . got drunk and told him about me and you, about Kit, and how I could always get

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money there. I thought my luck would change and I'd never need it like this. But you get the picture.

When you get this note, tear it up. You'll have to keep Kit quiet. It wouldn't be good for the public to hear about this, to know what I am. I suppose this is the axe over your head. I'm sorry. I could have come to you, but that would have been begging; I'm a fool with pride, remember? Anyway, your mother would have found out. She wouldn't have let me do it.

I promise you'll never hear from me again. I didn't know how this was going to feel. Believe that.

Joseph

"Hot . . . it's so hot, mother." Kit's faint, restless words drifted through the cold silence of the room. Joe turned quickly and moved to the cot. The boy's small fingers pushed blindly at the quilts. His lips were parted and his hair was damp. Joe covered him again.

It was time to go, he knew, yet he hesitated. He frowned. He went to the one-burner plate and lit the weak flame. It wasn't much, he knew. But it wouldn't be much longer, he reminded himself. Soon he'd be sending Kit home. Just an hour or so, now. . . .

He left the room and locked the door. Two flights below he left the building. The wind drove needles against his cheeks, brought tears to his eyes. The walks were deserted. One cab crept along its tedious way and vanished like a derelict ship in the night.

Three blocks from his room, Joe edged into a dark narrow alley below Canal Street on Third Avenue. He waited. The sleet made a blanket of thunder against a metal roof nearby. He scarcely breathed.

Suddenly the car lights swung around the corner, cutting a path of brilliance through the sleet and casting grotesque shadows over the skeleton of the elevated. The car slowed. It was a cab.

Joe saw a slender hand appear from the rear window. A small package arched through the darkness, hit the walk, and slid over the ice coating. The cab moved on and vanished. Joe waited, watching and listening. Was anyone following?

Then he ran from the alley, picked up the small package, and darted back into the alley. He followed its twisting course out to Canal Street. He was almost running, still. His breath was hot and hard in his throat. He stumbled up the stairs to the flat, and closed the door behind him. He leaned there, panting, trembling in the darkness.

"Mother? Is that you mother?" Kit's voice was small, urgent in the dark. Joe snapped on the light. Kit was sitting up in bed. The covers had slipped to the floor. His face was flushed. His teeth were chattering. His eyes

were very bright. "I want mother," he half cried.

"What is it, Kit? You're hungry?" Joe asked anxiously.

"It's so hot and I'm so thirsty. I—I'm afraid."

"There's nothing to be afraid of. You lie back down and—" Joe's words faded as he touched the thin shoulders. They were hot, very hot. He could hear the rattle of the child's breathing. "Listen, you're not sick?" he asked sharply. "You're all right?"

"It's so hot. I want some water and—I want mother. When's she coming to see me, Joe?"

"In just a little while, kid. Did they give you some medicine when you were sick before? Do you know what kind it was?"

"I don't know. Don't turn out the light any more."

"No," Joe promised. He bundled the covers about the child. He stood up and stared about the room, at the shelf above the burner. There was no medicine there. He tried desperately to think. What did you take? How did you know what was right?

His mind wouldn't focus. He kept remembering a little bartender named Rike. Rike had gotten a cold. He'd stayed in bed a while, then he'd gotten up—too quick, the doctors had said. Rike had taken pneumonia and died. Joe kept remembering. . . .

I could slip him into a cab, send him home in a hurry now, Joe thought. But it's colder out there now. The sleet's harder. That's what Rike did; he got out. . . . I could get a doctor here, but then. . . . No, they know his face! It's all over posters. . . .

He paced the room. He dug a stub from the ashtray. His fingers shook as he struck the match. He went back to the bed. He pulled up a chair and sat there, pulling up the covers as Kit's restless fingers pushed them away. He heard the ragged breathing, and it jabbed at his tense nerves. He got up again and moved away. He stood at the window, losing track of time. With a sense of shock, he saw the first dirty grey of dawn blur the sky beyond Brooklyn. Somewhere in the distance church bells rang, thin and lonely in the cold.

Joe turned back toward the bed. He bent over and touched the flushed cheeks. They were hot and dry. The breathing was fast and shallow. Kit was sick—Joe knew it with a frightening blank certainty. He might be very sick.

Perspiration poured off Joe's chin. He realized his hopeless ignorance, his utter helplessness. But more raw and deep than anything else was the fear that Joe felt inside him, waking and spilling through him like a cold fire through his bones. He sobbed. Sud-

denly he turned and hurried from the room, down the stairs, onto the ice-coated walk. The drug store on Canal Street was lighted; there was a kind of doctor there, Joe remembered. He was running.

HE ENTERED the warm tile-floored store. A white cat dozed near the radiator. A girl was polishing the soda fountain. At the prescription counter at the back, an elderly man was talking on the telephone. Joe tapped the counter anxiously. The man's deliberate voice droned on. Joe coughed harshly. The man nodded patiently.

At last his conversation ended. "Yes?"

"Listen, I'm in a spot. My sister has a boy, about eight. The kid—he had flu lately, and now all of a sudden he's hot and his chest is rattling, and for a while he was sweating. He's not any more and—well, she lives in a cold flat—not much heat, see? She's scared. Do you think it sounds bad for the kid, just what I've told you?" Joe ended breathlessly.

"He has a fever now? Then he certainly needs a doctor."

"But about—say, sending him to the doctor in a cab? I—"

"In this weather? For God's sake, man!"

"Yeah, I . . . thought so." Joe turned toward the door. He realized he was going back to the bare, cold room. Or was he? He saw the telephone booth, strangely waiting in the corner. His fingers touched a coin in his pocket. Through his mind spun a tangled dance of images; Selman . . . his smoky eyes, his pillow-like great shoulders . . . Cynthia . . . the silvery gold of her hair . . . the soft swiftness of her voice . . . Kit. . .

Suddenly he was stumbling toward the booth, clutching at the coin.

He felt his temples pounding as he dialed and waited. She answered: "Hello? Hello?" Her voice was tense. "Who is—"

"This . . . Listen, this is Joe, Cynthia. I—"

"Joe? Oh, Joe! Joe, how did you know I need—"

"Stop, Cynthia! Listen to me. . . . It's Kit. He's sick. I don't know how bad. Get his doctor. Bring him—" Joe gave the address—"top floor. Hurry, Cynthia."

"I'll be there," she whispered. Then she was gone. Joe felt small and cold in the booth. He rose and left the drug store.

Kit was sleeping when he returned to the room, but his breathing still echoed through the room. Joe tucked the covers more closely about him. He found another cigarette stub and lit it. He pulled the chair back to the bed and sat down. His eyes were fixed on the flushed still face. He did not hear the door open. The dry words jerked him erect.

"Well, now that's a cute little picture. Home life." Selman was standing in the doorway. His eyes were mocking. His shoulders were flecked with sleet. The door closed gently behind him. "You didn't meet me with the ten grand," he said pointedly.

"Ten grand? Oh. There," Joe said. He pointed to the table.

Selman's yellow brows rose. "Oh. You got it. Good boy!" His pinkish fingers closed on the package. Now he was smiling. "See, it was just like I told you—a pushover. But you should have made it fifty, kid. What's a few grand when—"

Super Fortresses Over Tokyo MAKE WORK FOR OUR MERCHANT FLEET



Because the Merchant Fleet must deliver bombs to the Pacific bases of our Air Forces. Furthermore, EVERY attack or advance by any of our armed forces increases the merchant fleet's job of backing them up with supplies and equipment. That's why men are needed for training by the United States Maritime Service for merchant shipping jobs. Right now men 17 to 50 are needed to enter Steward's Mates' training . . . Good steward's mates make efficient crews which keep the bombs moving to our super fortress bases.



CARL
FORSBERG

UNITED STATES MARITIME SERVICE

Joe did not think. He only felt something burn out in his brain. A film of fury blinded him. His fists gnarled. He leaped. He saw a flash of startled shock cross Selman's features, felt his fist smash into flesh and bone. He heard the choking grunt. It was over in an instant, and Selman was on the floor. A dark thin rivulet ran from his mouth. His eyes were suddenly bottomless and black. Joe was panting, trembling.

"Get out, damn you! Get out and never come around where I—"

Up the stairs came a swift staccato of running feet. The door was thrown open. She stood there a moment, her oval face pale. Her hair was jeweled with the sleet. Her eyes were shadowed. A half-length coat was thrown over her shoulders. To Joe she seemed like some spirit poised for flight, slender, vibrant.

She started to speak his name. Then she saw Kit and flew forward, her eyes suddenly breaking into light, a wordless cry slipping from her lips. She bent over him. Joe could only watch until the hotness burned his throat, and his eyes would not see any more.

Abruptly he turned at a sound, remembering Selman. He froze. The vast shoulders were hunched forward. The blood-coated lips were twitching. And a gun gleamed in the man's hand.

"Too many people, kid," he whispered coldly.

A coldness shot up Joe's spine. He edged between Selman and the bed. He felt something he'd never felt—never known how to feel—before. The gun became a taunting mockery, a challenge.

He felt his feet start forward. "Go on, but you won't—"

Then came the hurrying footsteps of other people on the stairs. Selman's jaw sagged. Uncertainty flickered in his eyes. He swept the room with a glance. He started towards the window, the fire-escape outside.

"Like I thought," he whispered. "But you'll see me again," he promised. He slid the window up and crept out. Joe watched, saw the man straighten. He saw him reach for the railing as he turned. Then he saw the feet begin to slip on the coating of ice. He heard the frantic scream from Selman's throat. He saw the feet go up, the grey coat flap an instant in the wind. Then the scream plummeted downward and ceased abruptly.

AN HOUR later the doctors were ready to move Kit. They were smiling confidently now. Joe heard them talking to Cynthia.

"... could have developed, assuredly, but we've reached it in plenty of time, Mrs. Marshall. We'll see you later, of course..."

As they departed, a uniformed policeman and a man in a worn serge suit entered. The man in the serge suit held the pack of bills. The policeman fingered his cap. Joe felt a queer empty twinge pluck at his stomach. He wet his lips.

"I suppose my mother notified you," Cynthia said. She was speaking swiftly. "I'm the child's mother, and I don't want to discuss it today, please. Any other time."

"Sure, sure," the man in the suit said. "We know a little about who the guy was, anyway. Gambler. Done time for arson, too. The gun was on him, and this money. You can identify it and get it back." He smiled. His eyes roamed to Joe and hesitated. And then, into the moment of waiting silence, Cynthia was speaking quietly:

"This is my husband. No, please—some other time."

"Sure." Then they were gone. Their footsteps faded. Joe turned slowly and looked at Cynthia. Her grey eyes were calm. Her fingers moved. There was a tearing sound. Joe looked down as scrap after scrap of paper drifted to the floor. They lay there, the remnants of a letter. . . .

"You asked me to tear it up," she said, almost whispering.

He looked back into her eyes. "I—I can't explain now."

"You don't have to." She paused. "Would you rather I didn't say anything, Joe?" she asked quietly.

"What could you ever want to say to me?" he asked harshly.

She started to speak, hesitated, then made the slightest shrug.

"There are all kinds of fools, Joe. Your kind and mine, for instance." Again she hesitated and her eyes clung to his. "This is as good a place as any to get an answer: Will I be seeing you again?"

"Why should you want to?"

"I can't explain." She gave the same slight shrug and wandered about the room. "Kit can't stand the grind," she mused strangely. "The doctors have told me that. He's through being a star. Through making so much money," she continued quietly. "And then . . . well, I've been thinking—living with mother—maybe it's not good for Kit."

For a moment he hardly saw her. Then his eyes cleared and he was looking at her again. His fingers trembled to touch her.

"Not now. Not like I am, Cynthia," he said slowly. Then, "But some day, not so long, I'll call you. Maybe then."

She accepted that, simply. She must have known how he felt. She held out her hand, smiling.

"Good-by—for not so long, Joe," she said softly.



Solving Cipher Secrets



By M. E. Ohaver

A CIPHER is a secret writing. The way to solve ciphers is to experiment with substitute letters until real words begin to appear. In solving, notice the frequency of certain letters. For instance, the letters e, t, a, o, n, i, are the most used in our language. So if the puzzle maker has used X to represent e, X will probably appear very frequently. Combinations of letters will also give you clues. Thus, the affixes -ing, -ion, -ally are frequent. Helpful hints appear in this department each month. Study them carefully.

CRYPTOGRAMS

No. 56—Chronological Inefficiency. By †Presbyos. Start with E, JYEK, and ECX. Next, AR, final —R, KYU, and JYAMY. All 26 letters are used.

"WORK JYEK AR E MILLAKKU, PEKYUD?" ERQUX
ACBOARAKAZU *EGUNECXUD. "ECS RLEGG-RAFUX VDIOT
IP TUDRICR JYAMY QUUTR LACOKUR ECX JERKUR
YIODR," DUTGAUX KYU HIS'R PICX TEDUCK.

No. 57—Dig Deep! By *Ty Roe. Guess apostrophized words MCK'L, EL'B, and NCK'L, noting H and HKN, also BC. Continue with MXEZK and LXGK.

"DEFG HYK *A ZHK LC *ABC; LXGK OCAP ZCKBZEGKZG
MCK'L XAPL *A BC. EL'B RABL H NGSL MXEZK HYK
CT AB *C; BC NCK'L SG H UEVGP, *A BC HKN BC!"

No. 58—Good for Inflation. By *Chemystic. Short words ZESM, SMEG, and MUZ, correctly guessed, will give all letters in GMUZG. Thus to DEFMSOGS, etc.

MODERN, JUNCILOT ZESM MATKUFOP, GMUZG TURKDO
TOPGESA, AOS PEPOSA-SZU COL JOPS FLUGG DEXSEPF
CUZOL UX SMEG DEFMSOGS FIG! MUZ JUNO?

No. 59—Jungle Scene. By Cosmopolite. Note initial diagraph AP- in the phrase APDXGLP APH. These words will provide all but one letter in *LDHBA and *BLH.

TX *LDHBA *EYBU *BLH KYDHRAR, KYGD-TXEP DYBEPHR
RNBVDVHF YOHD KBUUHX UYLR BXF RGXXHF YX
RNBSTXL CDBXEPHR, NPTUH ANHXAS-XTXH-TXEP
FDBLYX-KUTHR RNHZA APDXGLP APH BTD. NYDUF'R
LTBXA TXRHEAR!

No. 60—Night Lights. By †A. W. Note the use of three-letter IDH between longer words. Continue with ED and GIHOIUOEDL, checking with LUIGL.

ISGEGIC IDH REHOIPIC GIHOIUOEDL ICCABAHCK LSVVCK
INESU JOTA-LOQUM L EJ DIUSGIC LYK OCCSFODIUOED
ED FEEDCALL DOBMUL. LUIGL KOACH EDCK EDA-LOQUM.

No. 61—Important Contribution. By †S. A. L. Identify word endings -A, -D, -AD, and DD. The ninth word may then be tried. Next, GODNA and DNONPHRD.

ZONEPHNPV UHFDAGPLAD DOKLOYA GODNA BOND, NPR
VORD, FDAS RAGDZOZAE, TFX GOE THRS, ONNARS
*EAS *VEHDD DNONPHRD. OKK HFN BHE LPVNHX!

No. 62—Second Sight. By †F. Mack. Check your assumptions for pattern-word LSYYSB by substitution in PLLBSNCPYS. Follow up with 'USPYK and NXSF.

*QSDS, CSPGRHV, FPYEKSA PLLBSNCPYS-EGPA TRBOV
AXNXUZ YKBRHZK VHBT. EKPUZSA EGRYKSV JHXEDGL.
BSGPMSA 'USPYK WPGOV. (ZPXUSA LSYYSB NXSF!)

No. 63—Reporter Sleuth. By †W. E. S. Affixes HA- and -HAK will unlock FHVKRHVT. Observe high frequency of symbols T and V, also their use as final letters.

SNLPHFGMET ATRLNXGYOV TVBGXT GVDERP. FNRKOYD
ZNRLAGEHVY RAFTLYGCTV BGXYRLT. YGCHAK FHVKRHVT,
ZNHAV RAFTLUNLEF. ENBGYTV NRYEGUV, HASNLPV EGU.
NMYGHAV LTUGLF. VYNLD!

No. 64—Stumbling Block. By Mrs. Richard V. Burns. Here's an excellent first contribution from a new reader! An alliterative message, same initial being used throughout!

QUAAKER QXDTSKPUF QXYUSYR QKAKRRUA QUXGQUSEXY,
QUERYR QKFQYFSXUSGKF, QUQOGFFUSGKF, QYXYLXUA
QKAAUTRY. QAGZUN: QKUVHESKX QKZTXYOYFVR QGTOYX,
QGXQEZYFSR QUSURSXTTOY. QKFCXUSEAUSGKFR!

No. 65—Royal Betrayal! By †I. Givup. Symbol T occurs only as a final in this last cipher! There are 25 words, as many T's, and 144 letters altogether. What letter does T represent?

COYST BUYCKT HOST PENLIT OUKVXEFT ORBIT YCKART.
DEIPART CANIT PBAFT VERNIT HUOLYLEXT, PZAUT
LUET OHYOCKT. AELKART: DOIPT FCOST NUAFT DOFT
BUARYPT, PLAIT LVUACT. SYIT YCHUOLT!

THE famous key-phrase cipher featured by Edgar Allan Poe in "Cryptography," his essay on secret writing, crops up again in H. L. Kruger's special problem No. X-5. This time, the story of a gruesome discovery, made during recent military operations, and rivaling in fact the most fantastic inventions of Poe himself, supplies material for the cipher text. Readers unfamiliar with the key-phrase type of cipher will find the necessary details in succeeding paragraphs. First, though, here's the cryptogram!

No. X-5. Horror House. By H. L. Kruger.

*PWBRN THBE *BWEH ALOENO
TWOAAOP HBNHEN *ENOAWBP.
LHOAHAN RWLBA EOHNNHBE
HWA-THEENE ELBENABN.
EOLBRNB NONOLAHABNON
ENWE AWOWHON ENWAR AHENA
ERALEHNR TNWNAHBE, EOHBR
TOAA RLAWB NRLEEN.

In a key-phrase cipher, the letters of a 26-letter sentence act as symbols for the 26 letters of the natural alphabet. The illustrative key herewith, for example, shows symbol A for letter "a," L for "b," etc. And the word "the" would become EEEY in cipher; etc. Further, a letter here may represent itself, or a given symbol may signify any one of several different letters, as A for "a," etc., and S for "f" or "u" in this case. As a result, there are often some unusual patterns in the cipher, as EAAAA for "today," and SSHH for "full," with the present key.

abcde f ghij klmno pqrstu vwxyz
ALWAYS KEEP THREE GRAVES AHEAD

Asterisks in No. X-5, as in other cryptograms, indicate capitalization, and punctuation follows the plain text. Only well-known proper names occur in the message. And important clues are provided by common affixes and helpful pattern words. Full explanation of this cipher will be published in the next issue. Meantime, cryptofans, try your skill on Kruger's tale of terror!

- (1) April in England. Dearest Emma:
(2) LNDTA FYSEU DYTET ENEDT . . .
(3) ababa abbab abbab abaab . . .
(4) L O O K . . .

Now for the explanation of "Ty Roe's No. X-4, bilingual cipher published in the last issue. Only the last letter of each word in the outer or apparent message (1) contributes to the significance of the inner or real message (4). To decipher, group these final letters by fives (2); thus, the five words in (1) here give the first group LNDTA in (2). Next, transform these groups (2) into five-unit Baconian symbols (3) by substituting an "a" for each of the first 13 letters of the alphabet, and "b" for each of the last 13. Lastly, translate (3) into plain text (4) by means of the Baconian key which accompanied the cipher. Answer to No. X-4 in full: LOOK FOR

D-DAY ABOUT JUNE FIVE OR SIX. PROBABLY NORMANDY. Any reader may contribute ciphers for publication. And answers to current puzzles will appear in the next issue. No. 66—Cryptic Division. By †Ready Money. The key-phrase is numbered and divided thus: 0123 456789. For a starter, first subtraction will give E, duly noting sequence LS indicated in second subtraction.

S I T E) L O C A L E (R T
A K T T S
A S R E E
A L I E T
E C S

ANSWERS FOR LAST ISSUE

45—The most heartsick soldier is the one turned away with, "Sorry, buddy, nothing for you today," while his fellows get cheering letters from home.

46—"It is disagreeable to witness the embarrassment of a harassed pedler gauging the symmetry of a peeled potato."—Dictated by Lord Palmerston to his cabinet—none spelled all words correctly!

47—The incomprehensively vast United States of early days was crossed only by hardy pioneers. Busses, trains, planes have now reduced the journey from months almost to minutes!

48—News item: "Woman in town has just cremated her third husband." Mature maiden reader: "So it goes! Some of us can't even get one husband, while others have them to burn!"

49—Humble bumblebee flies atop pious bishop's bald pate. Soundly slapped, considers itself blessed. Returns to nest puffed up with own importance.

50—Much-bombed island, Luzon, allegedly enjoyed one hundred thirty-three inches of aqueous precipitation during July, Nineteen Twelve!

51—Buck private joins guerrilla fighters. First day, makes toward jungle. Soon returns dragging huge gorilla. Assignment misunderstood!

52—Molten iron containing dissolved carbon suddenly refrigerated, exerts terrific internal pressure. Transforms carbon. Result: synthetic diamonds!

53—Charming cherub constantly consumed chocolate caramels. Conscientious chaperon confiscated candy, caused considerable clamor. Child couldn't cease crying. Complicated case!

54—Haystacks tumbled upon windless nights, sheep escaped walled fields, bells rang, scaffolding poles scattered like matches, when huge stone, recently moved, unpinned famed English witch!

55—Key:

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
O P A Q U E D I S K

In the confusion attendant on transferring Solving Cipher Secrets from FLYNN'S DETECTIVE FICTION—where it was a popular favorite for more than 20 years—to NEW DETECTIVE MAGAZINE, we haven't been able to run all club news. But we're catching up! Please turn to page 92.

I'LL BE KILLING YOU-

A Satan Hall Novel

By Carroll John Daly



CHAPTER ONE

Satan's Seven Days

SAM BARD sat behind the big mahogany desk in his comfortable dark-paneled office, just above the 401 Club. The name was original with Sam. When anyone asked who the "one" stood for, he always gave the same answer. "Why, for you, of course." It wasn't especially funny in itself but after a lad had a couple it struck him as very humorous. So Sam gave away postcards with the slogan on it and let visitors from out of town send

They met in a final rendezvous—the up-and-coming master of murder, and the cop who wouldn't be killed—both backed by a city so evil that Satan was its only salvation!

them home. He did a good business, had been doing so for a long time. He had grown placid, hard.

He didn't look up now from his job of polishing the nails of his right hand on the left sleeve of his jacket. For a moment the burly man in the neat grey suit thought that Sam hadn't heard him. He repeated his statement.

"Down at the bar, Sam. He didn't ask to see you—just if 'good old Sam' was around."

After a bit, Sam Bard said, "And you're sure its Jimmy de Paulo? Absolutely sure, Warren?"

Warren looked surprised. With his flat nose and broad mouth and wide, cold eyes, he didn't

There was no gun in Satan's hand, yet Luntz swayed and dropped his. . .



look as if the name Warren belonged to him.

"Am I sure? Hell, Sam, he's met a dozen of the boys. Near broke my back greeting me. Sam, he ain't the same—"

Warren paused, and after a while Sam purred, "Not like the man we saw off on the train—less than two years ago? Not—" Sam Bard hesitated, looked hard at Warren—"not the same scared rat?"

"I ain't so sure about the rat part," Warren said. "But he ain't scared. Or if he is, it don't show. Boss, he couldn't think Satan Hall is dead, could he?"

"No—he couldn't think that."

Sam Bard turned his wrist and glanced down at his watch. He didn't speak for a few minutes, while Warren waited. He was thinking back to the departure of Jimmy de Paulo. The trembling, frightened man—a giant of a man—suddenly gone to pieces. The trip across on the ferry to get the train West. Nothing then about coming back to take care of his interests. He'd simply placed them in Sam's hands. One thing on his mind then, quick and sudden death. For Satan had told Jimmy de Paulo that New York City was not big enough to hold both of them. De Paulo had known what that meant.

Sam Bard ran his hand through his slightly greying hair. He had been a long time on the Avenue. A long time a big shot. A long time alive for the life he led. An old man in the business—actively in the business. And yet he was scarcely forty. . . . Others went into politics, put on a stomach and talked or bought their way about. They got fat and flabby and important; some of them even got respectable. Then their pasts caught up with them. They were bled white by the leaches of the night—or tried to fight when they had been away too long from fighting. Sometimes they won—but Sam Bard won always.

Sam was worried about only one man now—Frankie Luntz. A young man, too, straight out of a Chicago gutter. He came to New York and he came to Sam, but he had been, and was, too smart to take orders. He didn't know his way around. Like his kind he went groping about and running into things. But, unlike his kind, he didn't trip over those things. He trampled them down and went on to stumble over other things. Like the time he had stepped on Mike Callahan, and Mike had put the finger on him at four o'clock in the afternoon. When Mike climbed out of his car that night, right in front of his own home, with a guard on either side of him, someone stepped out of the darkness of the alley and laid four shots into Mike's chest, while the bodyguards dove to the sidewalk fumbling for their guns.

Until now, Sam hadn't been too unduly worried, but with de Paulo back in town things were different. De Paulo was an or-

ganizer. He was a good politician. He knew a lot of people—nearly all the right people. It would be a great combination if de Paulo got together with Frankie Luntz. If de Paulo could control Frankie Luntz. And de Paulo might. He was a man who went in for mental argument, good-natured sarcasm, backed by physical violence if the occasion warranted it. And even Frankie might see the advantage of tying up with a man who had been Sam Bard's partner.

De Paulo had never been afraid of anything or anybody—Sam scowled and then smiled—until that night Satan Hall put the finger on him and told him the city wasn't big enough for both of them. That night de Paulo had known fear.

Sam scowled again. How had de Paulo squared himself with Satan?

FIVE minutes later Warren opened the door and let in Jimmy de Paulo. He was still the same big brute of a man that Sam Bard remembered. Sam watched him carefully, half stretched his hand across the desk—and was slightly surprised when de Paulo grasped it.

"I've come back to stay, Sam," de Paulo said. "I never could get myself settled right in Chi. And I'm used to money—big money."

"It wasn't exactly a partnership, you know." Sam fingered the pen on his desk. "I paid you off for the club—and you took it. I tried to explain that when I wrote you."

De Paulo laughed. It was a good laugh, like the old-time de Paulo and Sam couldn't detect a false note in it. He said, "I like to have things understood right at the start, Jimmy. I'm running my business alone. There's no place in it for you."

"Hell—of course not." De Paulo nodded. "You've worked it up. You're entitled to all I put into it." And almost confidentially, "I've gotten hold of a little money, Sam—gotten in touch with some old connections—and we may find ourselves in competition. It will be an uphill pull for my syndicate with you as a competitor, I guess—but it will be friendly competition." A pause, then, "I hope."

There was not a question in the hope; not a question at all. More a sort of hidden threat. This was the old de Paulo, all right, Sam thought, backing up his verbal threat of competition with one of physical violence.

"And Satan Hall?" Sam Bard smacked his lips but looked at de Paulo shrewdly.

De Paulo laughed again. "I'm surprised at you, Sam—they tell me you think I left the city because of his threat. I thought you might have known better than that."

"You forget our trip to Jersey," Sam murmured, "Your condition. Warren was there—" and with a shrug—"The word went around."

I heard something about a dame, but you didn't explain. And you'll still have to settle with Satan—he never forgets.”

De Paulo frowned. Then he said very softly, “I’m back now. I’m letting the boys know how it is. You stay clear, Sam. I’d hate like hell to do in a copper—especially since I’m coming back in the business. But he’ll be just as dead, if he lays a hand on me.”

Sam Bard stared, hard and long, at the other. De Paulo was a fine actor, Sam knew that. He was quick with a gun, too, and ready to kill when necessary. But was he as ready as Satan Hall? Was Frankie Lunt? Sam nodded heavily.

“I’ll stay clear,” he said.

De Paulo grinned. “We’ll have a drink on it, Sam.”

Downstairs de Paulo swung to the left of the bar and, entering a telephone booth, pulled the door tightly shut behind him. When he joined Sam at the bar shortly, he was still smiling, but Sam thought there was tension behind the smile.

He clapped Sam on the back and said, “Well, everything’s set, Sam. What’ll you have?”

Sam said softly, “I wouldn’t overplay it, Jim. Satan’ll have the word on you by now.”

“Satan?” De Paulo spoke aloud, a little nervously, as if he were drunk on more than liquor. “Still worried about him, Sam? I remember you couldn’t wait for me to get out when Satan put the finger on me, the last time. Maybe that’s why the damn’ dick is still alive. He turns a guy’s best friends against him.”

Sam shrugged away the insult. With his back to the door de Paulo went on talking to Sam Bard. Sam watched the door until he saw a commotion near it; then he dropped his gaze to the bar—and listened. Sam knew all the sounds at his bar and he knew this one. The commotion broke away abruptly, and Sam faded suddenly back toward one of the booths, slipped into it.

Then the whole length of the bar was quiet, but for footsteps—ordinary footsteps, steady—like any other steps.

But de Paulo knew that they were not like any other steps. His face suddenly drained of blood. He swung around and faced the door. A man—a lone man—was walking slowly toward him, flanked on either side by watchers, who stood and held drinks in their hands—and didn’t drink.

De Paulo’s eyes were riveted on that advancing figure. He saw the steady movement, heard the hard rhythm of those feet. He saw the hands that hung at the man’s side, white and empty and swinging easily. He saw, too, the pointed chin, the narrow green eyes slightly slanted, the sharp nose, the, yes, the tapering car, whose tip showed clearly under the

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rackishly tilted hat—Detective Satan Hall knew the value of showmanship.

And Sam saw that Jimmy de Paulo didn't think and didn't decide as other men had thought and decided before him. De Paulo just let his mouth hang open and his glass fall to the floor. And then Satan had reached him.

No word was spoken by either man. De Paulo because he couldn't speak. Satan, quite evidently because he had nothing to say. He simply raised his right hand and with the palm of it smacked Jimmy de Paulo across the left cheek. It didn't look like a hard blow—it went such a short distance. But it threw de Paulo off balance and almost knocked him against the bar.

De Paulo's hand that went to grip the bar to keep him from falling never reached it. For Satan's left hand had come up and smacked against his right cheek, straightening de Paulo up again. Then Satan's right hand came up and this time it was a fist. It smacked de Paulo on the jaw. It lifted him up on his heels—then he shot slightly into the air and crashed to the floor.

Satan stepped over the fallen man, spoke to Sam Bard. "I want to see you privately."

Sam Bard sighed and stood up.

SAM stood there for a moment before he turned and led the way to the upstairs and his little office above. He was wondering, now, if a thing like this was ever going to happen to him. And what he'd do. Some men had reached for their guns and changed their minds. Some had pulled their guns and died. Some had struck out wildly. Few had taken it in stunned silence like de Paulo.

Sam didn't know what he would do. But he did know that he wouldn't go down like that—like a felled steer in the stockyard.

Slowly he led the detective up the stairs and into the office. At a nod from Sam Bard, Warren went out of the room and closed the door behind him, leaving the two men alone. Satan didn't speak. The silence played heavily on Sam.

Finally he said, "As easy as that—wonder what made him do it."

"Liquor, maybe," Satan answered.

"He didn't drink much—hardly any tonight." And when Satan said nothing, "You sure gave him a terrible jolt."

"And probably jolted some business your way," Satan told him. And before Sam could answer, "I want to see Nan Connors. Here. Alone."

"But her act goes on in a few minutes. She—"

"Yes or no," Satan cut in on him. "I don't want reasons."

Sam hesitated. He didn't want a fight with Satan Hall; if anything, he wanted some ex-

cuse to take orders from this man. But Satan didn't speak. How could a man know?

"I suppose it's important," Sam said finally. He pressed a button. Warren opened the door at once and Sam Bard said, "Get Miss Connors up here," and when Warren started to talk, "Tell Ivers to put on the La Rue Sisters. He can use Nan later."

"But the wiring—her mind reading act. Her—" Warren started.

"Ivers will have to fix that," Bard snapped.

Warren left. Ten minutes later there was a knock on the door and Nan Connors walked into the room.

She was small and red-headed and slim. There was a little red cap on her head and a red cape around her with a red lining, her show costume. They billed her as "The Imp" in the show.

"Satan," Sam said, "meet the little devil—you two should get along well. Look out she doesn't cop a gun on you." Then he walked out of the room and closed the door.

Satan walked over to the door and snapped the lock across it. He turned and looked at the girl. It was the first time he had ever seen her and he didn't know if her lips often trembled like that at the corners—or if she was usually so white. She was very beautiful; yet he thought there was a certain false steadiness in her face, that would turn into hardness with age.

"You know who I am?"

"Yes." The words burst from her. "You're Detective Satan Hall. You sent my father to prison. You visited him at our house. You had him meet you—elsewhere. Oh—I know—your duty. You posed as his friend, then sent him to prison—after—after you were done with him. Let me go. I don't have to listen to you. I don't have to—"

Satan took her by the shoulders, pushed her across the room, sat her down on the couch. The defiance grew sharper in her eyes. Her lips didn't tremble now.

"Nan Connors," Satan said slowly, "You tried to have me murdered tonight. No denial—I'll tell you how it was. When de Paulo came back, he got in touch with you. Maybe he came back because of you. Through him you hired a man from Chicago. His name is John Dario. He hid across the street from where I live—he was to shoot me with a machine gun when I came out. He knew about the time—from you. I was never supposed to reach de Paulo alive."

The girl looked at him. Her eyes were wide, her set mouth wasn't set any more. It hung open. But she was able to speak. She said, "How—what makes you think that?"

"Dario told me," Satan snapped. "I gave him his freedom for the truth. He said he didn't think I'd believe him, but I did."

She was swaying back and forth on the couch. Satan went to the water cooler and got her a drink.

She had trouble getting it down.

Satan Hall smiled. "No need for you to worry now," he said. "No harm was done. I simply knew de Paulo—I know his kind. As soon as the call came that he was threatening me here—well, I knew he figured I wouldn't come because I couldn't come. Did you think I would live at an address where I couldn't take care of myself? It was a simple matter to locate Dario—and Dario talked."

"You're not—not going to arrest me?" Briefly, looking at him, she seemed unable to believe that this was the man she hated. Whom even the men he worked with disliked.

"No," he said, and her mind leapt to the obvious conclusion. She came to her feet.

"I'm worth more to you out of jail than in. That's it," she said. "Like my father—a stool pigeon—until he turned too honest to be of any use to you any more." She paused, then said, "Well—I work for Sam Bard. I'll tell you nothing. There—there isn't a way you can make me!"

"I've been a pretty patient man." Satan smiled down at her, but his eyes were hard and cold. "You wanted to kill me before—remember?"

"I've always wanted to kill you," she told him. "Every day. Every night. Since my father went away. But I never tried to kill you. I never did."

Satan nodded. "I said you wanted to kill me—and tried to have me killed. I didn't say you tried, yourself." She looked straight at him, a little frightened now, and he said, "You lost your nerve, that's all." He crossed to the door ahead of her. "I'll be downstairs watching your act. Good-by for now."

He paused at the door, looked back. "Stay away from Frankie Luntz. You're too pretty to fool with him."

The girl's face colored. Her eyes flashed. Her lips were set tight now. She thought of what she had heard of Satan Hall, matched it against the undercurrent of viciousness she had sensed in his last words. He was a killer, a vicious killer who happened to be working with the police. Take the badge from under his coat and throw it away and what would you have. A—a criminal. A killer. A murderer in the night.

She went to the mirror and looked at her face. She had been afraid—yes. But not afraid of going to prison or even being tried for murder. Not even physically afraid of the man in any way. Then how was she afraid of him? Certainly not mentally—certainly not—it couldn't be. But it was. She was afraid of the unknown. Not what the man had said but what he hadn't said. What he hadn't even



Satan turned, looked at the girl. . . .

hinted at. What she didn't— She turned to face Sam Bard.

"What did Satan want?" Sam Bard asked, too casually.

She looked at him a minute, then decided suddenly.

"He said to stay away from Frankie Luntz."

"That's good advice," Sam Bard nodded. "I could have told you that myself—but then you are not a girl who likes to be told things. And Frankie is not a boy who—" Sam let it drop. Almost, but not quite indifferently he asked, "What else did he say?"

This time the girl threw it at him vindictively. "He said if I told you he would cut my throat—and if you listened he would—would slap you around!"

Sam Bard's eyebrows went up. He didn't know if the girl was ribbing him or not. It didn't sound like Satan Hall—but then, what didn't sound like Satan might very well be Satan. Satan's greatest asset, Sam had always thought, was Satan's unpredictability.

He shrugged his shoulders, said, "Personal, I imagine. Take his advice about Frankie Luntz, though. Satan liked your father."

And for the life of him Sam Bard didn't know why she stamped out of the room in a rage.

CHAPTER TWO

Holiday in Hell

SATAN went down the stairs, turned off before he reached the bar, passed along behind a little grill and came to the main dining room and dance floor, and to the red

plush rope that held back the people who were watching the floor show.

"Sorry, no tables, sir." The man behind the red plush spoke without looking up, his hand holding the slip lock at the end of the rope. He was surprised at the hand that gripped his, the strength of the fingers that manipulated his fingers rather than the lock itself, but at all events forced him to pull down the red plush for a moment.

"I'll find a seat," Satan said.

The man paled slightly as he looked into those green eyes, but Sam Bard hired good help and his voice held steady. "Very well, sir."

Satan walked across the room practically unnoticed by most of the guests who were giving the floor show their entire attention. But as the act ended, a voice called him.

Satan stopped, turned and saw the commissioner of police, seated with Harry Dorey, first assistant district attorney, and Inspector Edmund Grahame.

The commissioner indicated a chair, pulled Satan toward him and whispered, "Who do you think is in town, Hall—staying quietly at his mother's house for a few days? He wants you to be sure and drop in and see him. And I warn you—I don't want you dragged away from me. That's right—our former mayor and now governor. Asked particularly about you."

Satan nodded, sat down. "I didn't know why things were so respectable tonight, until I saw you people," he said.

"That's right," Harry Dorey smiled. He was the conning man in the party, still young despite his thinning hair, a go-getter. "You may knock your tough lugs over, Detective Hall," he went on, "but the commissioner is the only one who can put more clothes on the La Rue Sisters."

"I hear," said Inspector Grahame, looking steadily at Satan, "You've been slapping them around again. I mean de Paulo. What was the idea?"

"He had it coming to him," Satan said simply.

Harry Dorey broke in. "We're up here to look at those fancy hands and fingers of Nan Connors. I have seen her work before and it's marvelous. Rumor has it she learned it all from her father. They say she can pick your pockets—take out your watch, open it and memorize the number in the case and return it without your seeing her. Sounds impossible, eh? But Eddie here tells me, even swears, that it's so."

The commissioner smiled—Satan's teeth parted. Inspector Edmund Grahame's lips tightened. In his whole life, Satan thought, no one had ever addressed the inspector as Eddie.

Grahame said, "I think she's working for Frankie Luntz. He's the rising star today—and the setting one tomorrow. He's put over a half dozen killings since he's been in New York. No brain, no finesse, just a grim desire to shoot his way up the ladder. Like you, maybe, Satan. But I'll get him. A guy can't just run fast and loose, make no plans, work out no system, kill when the instinct to kill strikes him."

"I don't know," said Dorey. "Look what we suspect him of and look at the little proof we have. It's the planner who gets caught, the man who out-foxes the police. He is so busy covering up clues he never left, throwing red herrings over mistakes he never made, so wrapped up in protecting himself that he tosses himself into the hands of the police. Crooks that take ten minutes to raise a window, five more to cover a twenty-foot hallway, so they won't be heard, leave themselves open to that many more mistakes. Not Frankie Luntz. He does what he has to do too fast and too simply to be caught."

"He won't do it much longer, Mr. Dorey." Inspector Grahame put an emphasis on the "mister," and, as the commissioner and Harry Dorey got up from their chairs and crossed to the next table to greet two men and two women who had just entered, Grahame leaned over to Satan, said, "Frankie Luntz is fast with a gun. I don't see you slapping him around."

"He's your man," Satan grinned.

"And I wonder if Nan Connors is your girl?" And when Satan turned sharply, the inspector went on. "You sent her father to jail for five years. Harry Dorey took the lesser charge when we might have shipped Connors away for at least twenty years. I wonder why?"

"You aren't hinting at collusion, are you?" Satan asked. "You know what I think of Dorey—he'll be the finest district attorney we ever had."

"For you," said Grahame. "He approves of your methods. At least, some of them. I'm not saying I know why Connors got the lesser rap. And I'm not saying that you know. But I'm wondering if Dorey knows."

Satan shrugged his shoulders, said nothing. The inspector went on, "You don't really think the Connors girl is stuck on you. You don't actually believe that, do you?"

"No," Satan didn't smile. And, after a pause, "I don't honestly believe her actions toward me give me the right to assume that."

"Then why the Connors rap—the lesser plea? I've tried to get you to come and see me, Satan, but you didn't. Did it ever occur to you that Connors knew something about Dorey—something that would keep him from being elected if he got the nomination?"

"No!" Satan snapped. "It didn't, Inspector."

Connors gave me information. I made the deal with the district attorney's office—through Mr. Dorey. I owed it to Connors."

"He was your stoolie, eh. Gave you the few good cases you ever broke." Grahame's lips drew back from his teeth. He leaned back. "So that's it!"

"A cop wouldn't be much good without help—no one knows that better than you. Is that why you've been trying to get in touch with me?"

"Yes," said Inspector Grahame. "And something else. I am about to close a big case. Maybe I can't give this mug the electric chair. But I've dug up something on him and can give him a stiff jolt. He's sort of gotten wind of it. He's let me know that if I drag him in—that Mr. Harry Dorey won't get the nomination for district attorney of this state."

"So?" Satan looked into those steady grey eyes. "Why tell me?"

"Because," said Inspector Grahame, "I've got a job to do. I'm going to do it. I can't say that I like Mr. Dorey's methods—or his manners, or the way he slaps backs—but I think he'd make a good district attorney. I thought maybe you might warn him. The arrest will be in the morning. And—"

Grahame stiffened, fell silent. The commissioner and the assistant district attorney were returning to their seats.

SATAN didn't speak. He was in a bazy way watching Nan Connors going from table to table. There would be a hush, then cries of amazement and people running to that table and asking if it was really true. And suddenly the girl was at their table and the master of ceremonies, Ivers, was speaking.

They were honored tonight with the commissioner of police, his friend, the assistant district attorney and—Ivers fumbled—and two guests. If the commissioner would permit Nan Connors to hold his fingers—"not his hand" (laugh)—just the tips of his fingers, she would tell him the number of his watch.

The girl stood there, looking directly at the commissioner. Her lips were set grimly, her eyes were steady—deep and steady. Part of the act, of course—as if she were half in a trance.

The master of ceremonies was calling out, "No arrests tonight, Commissioner. Miss Connors will simply look through your vest and into your watch pocket and through the gold—I hope it's gold—case and see the numbers and call them off to you."

The girl threw off her cloak. Stood before them in her white tights, to which, no doubt because of the presence of the commissioner, had been added a tiny skirt. She stretched her hands across the table. Said in a far away voice, "If the commissioner will be so gracious as to permit. Your hands across the table, please." And as the commissioner smiled and stretched his hands over to her, "Just the tips of the fingers. So."

The commissioner smiled. The lights went out, leaving the room, but for the exit lights and those from the lobby, in darkness.

"The numbers on the inside of the case of your watch," said the girl, in a high unnatural voice, "The numbers on your watch—"

She got no further. Or if she did, the sound of the gun drowned out her voice. At the first shot, Satan dropped to the floor. There were three quick shots after that, maybe four. Satan wasn't sure, for a woman screamed and other screams followed. What seemed strange to Satan was that he was already on one knee, leaning against his chair with a gun in his right hand, when he was hit.

There was no pain. He simply felt a sudden burn along his right arm. Mechanically his left hand came up and took the gun from his right as that arm fell to his side. Satan was surprised, as much as he would ever be surprised at someone shooting at him. He hadn't expected an attack on him in the center of that crowded room, with the commissioner of police, the assistant district attorney and a police inspector at the same table.

He didn't move. He listened, trying to sort



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out the bedlam, to read sense to it, and failed. The lights went on ten seconds—certainly not more—after the first shot rang out.

The lights seemed brighter now. They showed the commissioner's face, hard and set and his hands gripping tightly those of the girl across the table. Nan Conners was white—deathly pale. The corners of her mouth quivered and the eyes that had been staring were now blinking frantically.

Satan saw the district attorney too. Dorey wore a bewildered look, until he started to give orders, demanding that the doors be closed. The tableau at the table was breaking up. But no one seemed to notice the absence of Inspector Edmund Grahame—until a woman suddenly put both hands to her head and shrieked.

Satan saw him then. And he knew that those bullets had not been meant for him.

Inspector Grahame lay on the floor, where he had tumbled from his chair. There was a hole in his back—as if the gun had been held hard against his body. And he was dead.

Assistant District Attorney Harry Dorey wet his lips before he spoke. Then he said, "Frankie Luntz—Inspector Grahame was going to arrest him in the morning. Did you know, Satan?"

"No," Satan said. "I didn't know it was Luntz."

And that was the first time either the commissioner or Dorey noticed that Satan had been hit.

THE commissioner sat on the edge of a big chair in his library that morning. He leaned his face against his hands.

For the third time he said in a tired voice, "I don't care what tricks the girl learned from her father. I don't care what she can do with those hands of hers. She didn't kill Inspector Grahame. Her fingers were against my fingers when the first shot came. She gripped my hands tightly at once. As far as we can discover Frankie Luntz was not at the club. Certainly not in the room at all." And turning his head toward Satan's arm that was held stiffly across his chest, "Your fingers look blue, Satan. Better have Doctor Scranton look at that arm of yours this time!"

"The arm's all right," Satan shrugged. "Frankie Luntz could have been in the crowd behind the ropes. After the lights went out, how long would it take him to step through the ropes—stick the gun against the inspector's back and pull the trigger? And then go back the way he had come?"

"But there were lights beyond the rope in the lobby," said Harry Dorey. "Someone would have seen him in the lobby before the shooting—certainly after it."

"Not before, because they were watching the act," Satan objected, "or after, because their

eyes were either glued to the table where a man was killed, or they were dashing around in panic. I've never met Frankie Luntz, though I've seen him once or twice. But it was certainly his way of killing. Draw and kill and run. No time wasted."

"But he couldn't see," the commissioner said half heartedly. "Oh, I know, Satan. You said he wouldn't need to. His eyes could have been riveted on Grahame. Over or under the rope—a few quick steps—yes—yes—I'll have him dragged in, of course."

"What good will that do?" asked Harry Dorey. "He's pretty well established here in the city. He's got organization behind him. He'll alibi us dizzy, with good, solid names backing him. They'd have him out before you got him in."

The commissioner turned and looked at the detective. "Too bad—about your arm."

Harry Dorey's eyes widened. Then he said, "Grahame was hardly Satan's friend. In fact, he took advantage of his position to tell me about it. I know he talked a great deal against Satan among the men—to the newspapers once or twice. We can't expect—"

He stopped and both men looked at Satan. "Grahame," Satan said, "was a good cop. He didn't like my methods. He didn't like my going over his head the way I did. He tried hard enough to get something on me—but he always thought it was for the good of the system—of the police force. He's been trying to put the finger on me for a long time. Grahame was too indirect—always planning and scheming. I like the direct method. I hate crooked cops. But I admire honest ones. Grahame was an honest cop. I wouldn't mind blowing Frankie Luntz apart."

He stood up, and Dorey stood with him. Presently the commissioner arose, also. It was as if, between the three of them, a tacit decision had been reached.

Silently the commissioner showed his visitors to the door.

AT THE corner, Satan buttonholed Harry Dorey. "I don't like guys who are so straight they bend backwards. But there's one thing I've got to know. If you were the commissioner and knew what you know about yourself—you'd still want Frankie Luntz shot out of the picture?"

"That sentence," Dorey said, smiling, "is a little confusing—and alarming."

"Not to you it shouldn't be. Or don't you know what the arrest of Frankie Luntz means to you. You'd like him dead, wouldn't you?"

Dorey sobered. "I might. You see, Satan, Luntz has been to see me. He didn't make a secret of his general set-up. He wanted to impress me. He's got money behind him. De Paulo started the ball rolling, through con-

tacts here, before he hit town himself. Now he's got something big in mind. A chain of night clubs—maybe just through New York and Jersey in the beginning—is a part of it. There's a syndicate behind him."

"Frankie is to run night clubs?" Satan was incredulous.

"No—no. I don't think it's that. But Frankie Luntz makes it possible to buy up spots cheap—spots that are making a profit. He's lined up important people for blackmail, and is widening his activities. When blackmail doesn't work—well, he understands direct action almost as well as you do. You saw his work tonight."

"And where do you tie in?" Satan asked steadily. "Why did Luntz come to see you?"

Dorey laughed unpleasantly. "I'm the man who more or less has the final say on the licenses for such night spots. It's been pushed my way, as candidate for district attorney this fall. Sort of cleaning up personally. It will look good to the voters."

Satan looked directly at Harry Dorey. "I always thought—always said you'd make the best district attorney the city ever had. You're a man to enforce the law—with violence if necessary. You're popular for the favors you don't give, not those you do. The city needs a damn good cleaning out. You're the one man I know can do it."

"That," said Dorey, "coming from you is something. This organization wants to reopen the old Rio Grande. Remember it was one of the cleanest places in the city. I was tipped off and refused them a license. Then Frankie Luntz came to see me."

"Yes?"

"Yes. He's a very interesting character. Not a politician who talks around things. He gives it to you straight. He said it was he who had hunted up the Rio Grande and found it available. If you remember, Dotty Latham, a woman ran it. She was found dead in Central Park with a knife in her back. He told me he got paid for finding that club. Paid enough to contribute to my campaign. He said they couldn't fail to elect me—and that he'd help me clean up the city afterwards. He said he'd point out the places that needed cleaning up. He even said he'd try to get proper men to take them over. And he finished by saying, 'We might even get your brother a job when he gets 'round again.' Those were his very words 'When he gets around again.'"

"I didn't know you had a brother," Satan said. "What's the matter with him?"

"He's in prison—and unlike the story books he's there because he deserves to be there. He's older than I am. So much that—and this'll be hard to believe—I didn't know I had a brother, myself until about six months back. And he's never heard of me—yet."

"Your record's good," said Satan. "It's clean. I know it backwards. Your brother's life is not yours. It can't affect yours."

"It can," said the assistant district attorney, "throw enough votes to beat me. The rival sheets could do things with the story."

"So?" Satan stared. "You gave Luntz the license?"

"I don't give them out," explained Harry Dorey. "I simply recommend. But my recommendation is final. I recommended that this license be not granted."

"And what happened?"

"Nothing." Dorey walked along the street with Satan now. "Absolutely nothing—yet."

"Luntz is waiting for something big," Satan told him. "Waiting until your nomination is a reality."

"No," said Dorey. "The syndicate sent through a lot of applications and Luntz has rung me up—always friendly and pleasant."

"How do you figure it?" asked Satan. "That Luntz'll wait until you're elected and feel the power and the prestige? Hate to lose it—and unbend?"

"Luntz," said Dorey, "isn't a waiting man. No, Satan, I just believe he doesn't know who my brother is."

Satan stopped and stared at him.

"I told you I heard about my brother only a few months ago," Dorey said, "I heard it when Conners was on trial, before he took his plea. Conners came and told me about my brother. He knew the facts, all right. And Conners offered to keep it secret—if I'd see he went free."

"So that's why you didn't try that case." Satan nodded in understanding of a thing that had been bothering him for a couple of years. "You've got guts—Mr. Dorey. If I didn't have this cluck arm I'd slap Luntz around for you. I'd give a lot to see you district attorney of this city." And after a moments thought, "But I can't just go around shooting men to death. It seems like sometimes I lack a proper respect for the citizen who pays my salary—as if—well, as if there was something soft in me."

Harry Dorey grinned, put a hand on Satan's shoulder.

"Even you," he said, "feel the restraint of civilization. I wouldn't like anything like that, Satan. At least for myself. But if Luntz is bluffing and only has an idea, and I get the job of district attorney—my first act will be to tear you away from the commissioner and turn you loose in the city."

Satan said, "I suppose Luntz had tied himself up with some pretty smart people?"

"The best. Some big men have money in his syndicate, not knowing it's a crooked racket. Others know, and others have been forced in. I meet and talk with—yes—and every day take orders from men I'd like to put

in jail." He stopped, looked at Satan's hand. "Your fingers are swelling—I'd go and have that arm put in a cast."

But Satan said, "I wonder what's keeping Luntz silent on that brother business."

"I don't know," said Harry Dorey.

"I think," said Satan thoughtfully, "I'll go and find out."

CHAPTER THREE

Too Fond of Dying

SAM BARD said, "Hell, Satan, you're not going to break up my show again tonight! Besides, the place is already full of cops. Did you find out who shot Grahame?"

"No," said Satan, "we don't have to find out. We can guess."

"I might guess too," said Sam Bard. "But I won't guess out loud." And then, "Frankie Luntz was in the bar downstairs. You must have passed him."

"Like that," Satan said. "Well—I got to see Nan Connors."

"I should have closed the place." Sam Bard got up and walked around his desk. Then he paused. "Luntz has been asking about you up and down the avenue—looking up guys who have seen you work. They say he batted De Paulo's ears down when Jimmy went around to him for a hideout. Guys are beginning to ride De Paulo already. You sure put the mark on him. He's done around here."

"They all are," Satan said. "What about Nan Connors?"

"Don't that talk about Luntz being interested in how you work mean anything to you?" And when Satan just stared at him, "He'll know, Satan—about Grahame—that you can't prove anything on him."

"You'd like to see me kill Luntz, wouldn't you?" Satan asked.

"Well," Sam Bard grinned. "I'd rather see you kill him than see him kill you. After all, you're not in the night club business."

"And I wouldn't buy you out with heavy dough."

"Sometimes," said Sam, "This racket gets too lousy, even for me." And suddenly, "I don't know, Satan. You've always left me alone. I guess I run this place as decent as anyone can run a night club. The shooting is packing them in tonight, but after a bit—well, the curiosity will wear off. Besides, with that bum arm, maybe you should go to a hospital."

"Get Nan," Satan said.

Nan Connors had a sullen rather than a defiant look when she came into the room. But her eyes were sharp as they took in Satan's bandaged arm, the sling around his neck. They even brightened, but she didn't say anything.

Satan said, "I was up to Sing Sing and saw

your father, Nan. How much of that brother stuff did you spill to Frankie Luntz?"

She got her breath quickly, steadied. "Is there a law against telling the truth?"

"There could be." Satan looked steadily at her. "Have you told Luntz any more since last Tuesday?"

"Why last Tuesday?"

"Because you didn't know any more until last Tuesday. That's when your father gave you the final dope. He didn't expect you to use it. It was only—well, if you were ever in a jam with Dorey. You let your father believe you might be. Your father thinks you're straight, Nan."

"You told him otherwise?"

Satan said, "I wouldn't want you to go any further with that story about the brother."

"You'd jail me for attempted murder—on what Dario told you? If you can find Dario."

"Nan." Satan looked hard at her. "I don't like you much. In fact, I don't know as I ever met a girl I liked less. Your father just naturally has larceny in his heart. You've got viciousness in yours. I put the right of the citizen who pays me ahead of both of you. So far you've endangered no life but mine."

"And you think you can get something out of me?"

"I'd like your promise that you'll never talk to Luntz about this brother."

She looked up, her eyes flashing. "You get my father out of jail," she said. "You bring him home to me and I'll shut up. You're keeping an old man in jail and letting a murderer go free. I'll talk to Luntz tonight."

"Wait," Satan said. "Give me time. Twenty-four hours. I might do something."

"To Luntz?"

"To get your father free."

"So you could do it?" She seemed to be thinking aloud. "You could do it—you framed him!"

Satan said nothing.

"All right," she said finally. "I'll give you time. When I'm sure it's wasted time, I'll talk to Luntz."

Sam Bard came in then. It was quite evident that he thought Nan Connors had gone, for he said, "Frankie Luntz is still shooting off about that—oh, Hello, Nan. Say, Satan—those fingers look bad."

"Yeah." Satan nodded as the girl turned and left the room. When the door slammed, Sam hurried over and talked fast.

"I tell you, Satan—though I shouldn't. These boys behind Luntz think you've got it in for the syndicate. They say you and Harry Dorey are like that and—well—it would make Frankie Luntz the biggest shot on the avenue—if he knocked you over. He's got it in for Dorey, too—thinks he can handle Dorey with you out."

"You're a great plugger for your business." Satan grinned at him.

"He's young, Satan. He's fast—awfully fast. You couldn't paste him around with two hands and not get action! So you think I'm not thinking of you. Luntz is poison. Remember, everybody isn't afraid of you." And when Satan's eyebrows went up, "Stay in the hospital for a bit. Think what it would mean to Luntz to put you down."

"Did he say that?" And Satan laughed. It was a funny sort of gurgling. It was the first time Sam Bard had ever heard him laugh. And he didn't think it was funny.

"No, he didn't exactly say it." Sam Bard stepped back a couple of paces. "He said it would be funny if someone did."

"Wouldn't it?" said Satan. "Bet he'd laugh himself—to death."

Satan walked slowly to the door, stood for a long time with his hand on it. Then he went out.

THE governor was in a jovial mood when Satan presented himself at the house on Madison Avenue. Satan heard his voice booming out of a rear room as he waited in the small sitting room just off the hall, and presently the other strode in.

He listened in silence, then lit a cigar, offered Satan one, and sitting down in a chair stretched his long legs out from under his dressing gown and looked up at Satan Hall.

"I never thought I'd live to see this day," he said. "I had you on the mat—and the commissioner, too, when I was trying to run this city. I said I'd have your scalp and do you know what the commissioner said? He said he had taken the job with no strings on it. And if I wanted to run you off the force because some editorial writers bellowed and some politicians squealed to high heaven—why, he'd go, too. Between the two of you, you made my administration a good one—a damn good one. You were a vote getting team in the long run. The commissioner had color. And you put that color on canvas. Met violence with violence—but to think you'd be coming to me to have a convicted criminal released from jail."

"It is to put a more dangerous one in," Satan reminded him.

The governor hesitated. "On the face of it, it sounds like a good deal. It's almost like having your cake and eating it too. At least, eating the best part of it." He got up and walked to the window. Then he turned suddenly and, pointing his cigar at Satan, asked, "There's more behind it, isn't there?"

"Yes," Satan said without hesitation. "There is."

"But that is all you are going to tell me. I thought as much. This isn't like you. Why didn't you go and shoot this murderer of In-

spector Grahame to death? Once you'd have—"

"I—I couldn't do that."

"Why not? That's what we fought about. That's what brought out the editorials. I won't say it was outright killing. I never did. But you did manage to get yourself in a most—a most dangerous position—there is no denying that. And you did manage to shoot your way out, always. Yes, Satan. On the face of it—legally—the other man was always in the wrong. But at the same time he was always dead. You haven't spoken to the commissioner, then?"

"No, I haven't."

"Um—" The governor sat down and smoked for a long time in silence. After a while he got up again, stood before Satan Hall. He finally spoke. Very slowly and with a great deal of dignity.

"Detective Hall," he said, "I have been thinking about the convict Connors. His health is not good. His punishment, for a man who had aided the state, was quite severe. That he is willing to aid the state now—uh—that through him the state is being aided, impresses my sense of duty to the people. If this aid meets with my approval—and my approval is subject to your approval, as—uh—the arresting officer at the time of Connors apprehension—I'll parole the man, at once." And when Satan did not speak, "Well?"

Satan pulled down his vest, tightened his jacket slightly with his good left hand. He seemed to have hard work finding words.

"Well," he spoke at last. "It was what I thought you'd do. It was for the best interests of the people."

"You'd do the same thing in my place?"

"No, I wouldn't." Satan shook his head.

"I've told myself I would—but I know I wouldn't."

"Not for the best interests of the people?"

"But I wouldn't know it was for the best interests of the people." Satan gulped. And when the governor's chin shot up and his mouth opened, "I don't mean," said Satan, "if our positions were reversed—but I mean if I were you and a guy named Satan Hall told me nothing more than he told you. There are few great men today, Governor. You're one of them."

This time it was the governor who was rocked. A quick flash of color came into his face. He put a hand out and placed it on Satan's shoulder. He remembered how the commissioner had fought for this man when political and editorial pressure demanded he be ousted. And the commissioner had been right, of course. Some politicians didn't believe that yet, but the papers were coming around and a few of the top judges had whispered to him in confidence that if it wasn't good legal

practice, Satan's method certainly was justice.

The governor drew himself up now—and was about to speak words that Satan would long remember. He was gifted that way. He opened his mouth.

But all he said was, "Take care of yourself, Satan."

DOCTOR SCRANTON, the medical examiner, said, "It's the damndest cast I ever put on a man, Satan. I'm not proud of the job as a doctor—but then you have a hand like a ham. Don't worry about my talking; I wouldn't take credit for that job. But it won't kill you anyway."

"It might," Satan said very seriously. "Good night, doc. This scarf seems to hold the arm up pretty well."

"You'd do better to have a steel chain to hold it," the M.D. said gruffly but humorously. "As a medical examiner, I'm more used to taking the dead apart than putting the living into shape."

Satan saw Nan Conners at her apartment before show time. She looked at the topcoat he wore, though the weather was warm, and when it fell open she fairly gasped.

"Blood poisoning?" she asked. The cast covered his hand, shutting in the fingers entirely. Then she looked up, deliberately voiding her eyes of sympathy. "What about my father?"

Satan said, "You deliver the murderer of Inspector Grahame to me, and keep your mouth shut—and I'll have your father out."

"The reward for arrest and conviction—maybe two years." Her mouth wasn't pretty when she curled it up like that. "Nothing doing. I want my father out—first."

Satan shook his head.

"I can't do it. But you won't have to wait. Give me enough evidence simply to arrest the murderer and your father will be sprung—within forty-eight hours—maybe less. You have my word on that."

"And what good is your word to me?"

"It's good," said Satan slowly, "to every—crook along the avenue."

"You were going to say to every other crook, weren't you?" She looked straight at him.

Satan said simply, "Let's put it this way—I want to get your father out of jail as much as you want him out."

"You're a funny guy with a funny racket." She seemed to be studying him now—looking up at him with her eyelids slightly closed. "I suppose some day you'll spring it on me." She turned then and going to the mirror took lipstick and reddened up her mouth. Then she turned and faced him.

"I can't do it," she said suddenly. "You've got to spring my father first. I don't believe

you. I don't know how—how you could trust me not to spill the story about Dorey's brother later, when he was free. I don't believe you think there is a decent thing about me."

"One," said Satan. "You love your father. And how do I know you wouldn't talk? If you talk—why your father is simply out on parole. He can be picked up again."

"Even if he didn't want to break parole—you'd see that he did!"

"No," Satan shook his head.

She said, "My father has to be out first." And when Satan started to shake his head, "What difference does it make? If I don't give you the evidence—why you can pick him up again just like you said. He's got to be out first—and it's got to be secret. No one must know why. No one must know—I put the finger on the murderer."

Satan put on his hat, turned toward the door.

"Is that final?" he said.

"That," said the girl, "is final."

Satan went to the door. He didn't look back as he left.

CHAPTER FOUR

Now That He's Dead...

SATAN got the word early the next night. A phone call told him Luntz was at the bar at Sam Bard's, waiting for him.

Satan looked at his bad arm and grinned evilly. And he guessed Luntz knew about it, and could even guess where Luntz had heard about it. He shook his head. Yet after his interview with Nan Conners, there was but one thing for him to do.

His second telephone call came from Sam Bard.

Sam said, "Don't be a fool, Satan—stay home tonight. Luntz is shooting his mouth off about you. He's afraid you are going to step on his toes—or something worse. Anyway he's set on killing. I can see it in his eyes."

"Thanks," Satan said easily, "I don't think anyone would expect me out with an arm like this."

"I wouldn't," Sam said nervously. "You'd be a fool to come. It would be suicide—and two cops killed in my place wouldn't be good business." And when Satan didn't answer right away, Sam laughed strainedly. "You sure have a reputation, Satan. Some of Luntz' friends are here. They keep saying you'll come, anyway. They're telling about the time you dragged yourself out of the hospital—"

Satan said, "I'll see how things break."

Sam Bard seemed to hesitate. Then he said abruptly, "He's feeling pretty cocky. He made me an offer for my place tonight."

"So that's how it is?" Satan's laugh sounded strange over the phone. "Luntz has me

dead and buried. Sam—which side are you coming in on?"

"Hell! I can't handle him and his syndicate and stand within the law too. You know my place is on the level. I'm just telling you, Satan. If you come into my place tonight, come with a gun in your hand."

Satan put down the phone. Bard was right. If Satan didn't show up tonight the crooks would put their own interpretation on it. Nothing else would register. He'd have to start over again. He would have to go. He'd always known that—had known it full well when he let Doc Scranton encase his entire hand as well as his arm.

As for shooting Luntz to death—walking in the door with his gun out and shooting him to death—Sam was right about that too. Satan often wondered if he could do that. If that thing he called his conscience would let him do that. There was Jake the Rose. Satan had been tempted there. But he didn't kill Jake. He knew now it had been a mistake. An old woman and a little child would have lived if Jake had died a little sooner. There was Steve Roder too. Steve had walked out of the court a free man, and Satan had stood there on the steps when Roder went down them. If he had shot Roder then? Well, they picked Roder out of the death car in a jewelry hold-up, only two months later. A clerk and a guard had been killed in the store and later, when Roder lost control of the car and it plowed into the crowded sidewalk on Fifth Avenue, a pedestrian had been killed, another maimed forever.

But how could you know in advance, unless you invited your killer to kill again—and offered yourself as a target? That was what he had done, time and again—yet Satan could point his finger at a half dozen men alive, whom he knew to be guilty of murder—but about whom the law could do nothing.

But you didn't have to be psychic to know men like Luntz were born to kill—and kill again. Satan picked up his phone, called his

precinct. Then he waited. In a half hour he got his report. "Nothing doing on your block, Satan. We've cased the neighborhood and you can go out without having to decorate your block—or the blocks around with a single corpse. Not even your own—"

Satan hung up slowly. So Luntz had the guts then. Luntz was really waiting.

Once more the phone rang. Satan lifted the receiver. This time it was Nan Conners.

"I've been waiting," Satan said softly.

Nan said, "I just spoke to my father on the phone. He's free. All right, Satan. Come down to Sam's place and I'll give you the evidence you need—to arrest the murderer of Inspector Grahame. And Satan—come in by the side entrance. I'll have someone there to meet you and slip you in to me. Pull your hat down and your coat collar up. Be careful."

"Why?"

"Luntz—" the girl lowered her voice—"don't go through the bar. He's ready for you this time—and he's not the type you are used to intimidating. He'll kill you, using your own tactics. He's had advice from lawyers. So—come in the side way."

She hung up then. Satan nodded grimly. So Luntz was not the only one who wanted him dead. Nan Conners wanted him dead too. The stage was now set. Luntz had consulted a lawyer.

Satan's eyes narrowed and seemed to slant a little more. He lit a cigarette, striking a match with some difficulty. They had set the stage. The performance was by this time well advertised. It would be a pity if the main actor in the cast didn't appear. Satan's mouth curled at one end. He took a long drag, squashed out his cigarette in an ashtray. Then he got dressed and went out.

THE grapevine was working that night. Sam Bard was doing a big business. The booths across from the bar were crowded to capacity and so were the tables of the grill. Big names along Broadway were

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there that night, some knowing, other guessing. Big names to the smaller fry of the night, big names to the police and the patrons who played a little too far on the fringe of their own society.

Sergeant Morris Kane of homicide was there, too. Dressed inconspicuously in a plain blue suit, he kept far back in the shadows by the grill.

He didn't quite know why.

There was much laughter and drinking but if the laughter was phony the liquor wasn't. Frankie Luntz was throwing a party—but his drinking was for appearances' sake only, though it was whispered back and forth that Satan had everything wrong with him from a broken neck to a slight cut on his finger. There were many there who hated Satan and said he wouldn't come—yet the stage was set. Everyone expected something. But only Satan Hall could pull up the curtain.

Outside in the street Satan Hall was turning into Broadway. His steps, unhurried yet long and heavy, carried him along with amazing speed. Though the night was fairly cold and the fog had turned into a drizzle he wore no overcoat. The whiteness of the cast stood out plainly, held up stiffly by a plain black scarf.

Frankie Luntz, Satan thought. A sensation along the avenue . . . Newly come into power. . . . Coming now into more power. Why does he want to chance wrecking it all in one night. . . . A bluff? Or because Frankie Luntz will never get such a chance again.

Satan nodded. It would make Luntz a big man in the racket. Perhaps the biggest along the avenue. He'd have a lot of people behind him too. He could see the case being tried now if Luntz killed him; just as it had been tried in more than one editorial before. For they had all "guessed" there would come a time when Satan did not fire first—when Satan died. It would be self-defense, of course. A good lawyer would get Luntz off easily. Satan always struck the first blow. Others who had tried to defend themselves had died. Satan could see that. Luntz had seen that too. A man has a right to defend himself especially when he knows that others who weren't quick enough had died.

Satan's broad shoulders shrugged. He tried to jerk his cast-covered arm into a more comfortable position. But it remained the same, straight across his chest—high up on his chest.

Satan laughed slightly as he neared the entrance to Sam Bard's bar. He saw the taxi driver stand and stare at him a moment, then turn and run inside. It would be interesting to see how it came out. Certainly Luntz had a fair chance if he was as quick as people said he was. But he'd have to be quick. For Satan

knew the chips were down tonight—and he, too, was on the kill.

He didn't realize until he shoved his way through the door of the bar, that he and Luntz had never met before. They had never seen each other face to face. That was funny. They would meet now for the first and the last time. Satan's lips set grimly. Somehow tonight he didn't expect the yellow to ooze out of the criminal. He knew that one of them must die.

A man stopped in the middle of offering a bet. "Satan. Satan Hall," he said simply; then his feet froze to the floor and his hand froze to the bar.

There had been no room to take a step along that bar, let alone room to stride down the length of it, thirty seconds before. Now there was room—plenty of room. Human flesh seemed to merge into other human flesh as two people stood where only one could stand before.

The full length of the bar the two men faced each other. Two men who had never met before. But they both knew—they both understood.

He looks, thought Satan, as if he might waver—or as if he might draw. I don't think he's so sure now, though he planned it long and must have rehearsed it over and over.

And Satan's eyes hated Frankie Luntz.

It was a long bar, but though Satan didn't seem to hurry he covered the distance quickly. No sound, nothing but the pounding of his feet, the steady pounding of his feet.

Frankie Luntz watched him, fascinated. Then his eyes dropped to that swinging left hand, white and empty, and the whiteness of the huge cast that bulged over Satan's right hand, and he pulled himself together. No man could pull a gun on Frankie Luntz with a single hand—especially if he first had to strike with that same hand.

Satan saw the courage come back into the man's face. He was directly in front of Luntz and, despite himself, despite his rehearsal, Luntz' right hand was creeping up under his left armpit.

Satan said, in a loud voice, "If you pull that gun out I'll expect you intend to use it and I'll shoot you to death."

Even Luntz who had planned the thing and gone over it again and again was surprised when it came. He hadn't seen the left hand move before it cracked him across the face, palm wide open. And he hadn't realized that such power could be put into an open-handed slap. He staggered back, but not of his own volition. His head swung slightly. Then it didn't swing anymore. He heard the gasp along the bar. Satan was going to do it again—do it with one hand. He was bringing his left hand over his shoulder.

Frankie Luntz flashed into life. His grip

was never so sure. His hand was never quicker. His head never clearer. His eyes never sharper as he jerked out his gun and tightened his finger on the trigger.

There was just a single shot. Everyone in that bar heard it plainly. Everyone saw the gun in Luntz' hand. Sergeant Kane came to his feet. He wondered if he could reach Satan before he fell. He didn't like Satan. He didn't like his methods. He didn't like his pounding through the city taking orders from no one but the commissioner—but he was a cop, a cop who had been shot before his eyes.

Then Sergeant Kane's eyes widened. Satan's back was to him and Satan stood erect. His knees were steady. But Frankie Luntz's weren't. Frankie's knees were beginning to give. And then Sergeant Kane saw Luntz' face, saw his forehead, the tiny hole in it. There was a metallic clink as the gun fell from Luntz' hand and hit the marble floor. Then Luntz dropped to his knees and pitched forward on his face.

Satan turned, looked down at the dead man, then spoke. "Kane," he said, as if he had seen the Sergeant all along, "take care of the body, will you? I've got business inside."

"Yes," Kane hardly breathed the word. "I saw your hand, Satan. I saw—I could swear that it never came down—and there's no gun in it now."

"No," said Satan. "There isn't. I'll give it to the medical examiner later if he wants it." And to Sam Bard, "Take me to Nan Connors—there's a good fellow, Sam."

Sam said, as they crossed the narrow hall that was curtained off from the main dining room, "I was watching, Satan—watching closely. I—I could swear your hand never moved. I didn't even see the gun."

"You weren't meant to," said Satan.

SATAN found Nan Connors in a small backstage dressing room. She closed the door, leaving Sam Bard outside, then turned and pointed at two frightened girls who were huddled on a couch. But they weren't any whiter than Nan Connors. Her voice trembled slightly when she spoke.

"He's dead—isn't he?"

"That's right," Satan said. "Frankie Luntz is dead. Interested?"

She was recovering quickly. The haunted look was leaving her eyes—a shrewd calculating one taking its place. But her voice didn't shake when she spoke.

"Sally Preston and Mamie Meyers." She gestured to the two girls. "They work in the show and were meeting a couple of boys out front when Inspector Grahame was killed. They had just left the boys when they saw Luntz enter the club, watched him slip through the crowd. They even saw him go

under the rope and reappear directly after the shot. He walked out on Broadway without anyone else noticing him."

"They recognized him, of course. They are willing to sign statements?" Satan didn't say anything about their withholding evidence.

One of the girls said, "We were afraid—deathly afraid. We—well, Nan always tells the girls what to do—and we told her and she— Yes, we'll sign statements. Now that he's dead."

"Is it enough evidence?" Nan Connors asked.

"Now that he's dead—yes." Satan nodded. "If you're afraid I'm going to pick up your—our hostage—don't worry. The girls will have to make a statement down at headquarters." And looking at their attire, "Get some clothes on. Sergeant Kane will call around for you."

When they left the room Satan seemed suddenly tired. He said, "There is no actual proof, Nan Connors, that you put Frankie Luntz up to this. Yes, I mean up to his dying. And if there was I wouldn't lay a finger on you. You see, I made a foolish promise to your father. He didn't want you to know—said you were stubborn." Satan's voice grated with the irony it gave that line. "I gave him my word I'd watch over you while he was in prison. Sure—I'm glad he's out."

The girl stared at him.

"You—he never told me about any promise. He told me the truth then—that you sent him up because you had to."

"Because," Satan said, "someone else would have nailed him to a twenty-year rap. I arranged with the district attorney for him to plead guilty to the lesser offense. He's free now. I've fulfilled my promise and—"

"Satan—I didn't know. . . ."

Satan's left hand had shot up to grip her right wrist and take her arms from around his neck. He held that wrist hard down by her side. He didn't mean to hurt her, but if it did, his grip remained just as tight.

"Satan, I—"

"What I did," Satan snapped, "was because I gave my word to your father. I didn't know the sort of woman you are. And he doesn't either. I won't tell him. He believes in you."

"I didn't want you dead tonight." She grabbed him by the arm as he turned toward the door. "He was threatening me—Frankie was—Satan, wait!"

Satan stood looking down at her. He didn't believe her but he said, "All right, then. I did you a good turn tonight. Appreciate it because it's the last one I'll ever do for you. I don't want any part of you, Nan Connors,

(Continued on page 89)

CRIMSON HARVEST

*The road to hell is paved with good inventions—and this killer's alibi was one of them.
... Cunningly and well had he covered the tracks of murder—the phantom ploughman of Hell's Half Acre, who was raising a crop of—Death!*

THOSE around the Mason City police station had great respect for the Bald Eagle. It was something of a joke calling Jim Lawrence the Bald Eagle, but maybe the title fit him better than most of us imagined. Down two blocks east of Central Station was the Mason County courthouse. Just inside the Jule Street door, on your right, was the sheriff's office—and there you found Jim Lawrence. He was the sheriff, part Indian and as bald as a billiard ball.

The phone rang, peeling out an insistent summons like some prankish kid was on the other end of the line. I started for the handset. Then Jim said, "Sit still, Nate, I'll get it." He got it all right—and he got something else. A shock!

Lewt Marlin was dead. Lewt Marlin, former state representative, known as the Hayfield Politician, had been murdered, shot twice through the face and his dead body . . .

"Come on, Nate," Jim said. "You know, it's a funny thing, but George Weatherspoon, your cousin, Lewt's son-in-law, was in here this morning early. He told me he was worried about the way Lewt was acting. More than likely there's not a danged thing to the murder theory. It's just plain suicide."

*"I swear I never saw two bullet holes so close together,"
the sheriff drawled.*



By
Rex
Whitechurch

I don't know what came over me as we left the red brick courthouse, but I felt damned uncomfortable. George hadn't been getting along so very well with Lewt. I guess mainly they'd disagreed about how to run the two hundred acre farm. George was an expert, a college trained agriculturist—but Lewt owned the farm. That made a big difference.

And George was handsome, while Molly was plain—it had been said perhaps a thousand times that George had married her for old Lewt's money.

We Weatherspoons—there's an army of us, believe me, scattered around through Mason County—are a clannish lot. We have our family picnics and gatherings and we visit back and forth. For one Weatherspoon to be in trouble signified that all the Weatherspoons would risk getting in trouble to extricate the unfortunate one from the quagmire.

The voting strength of the Weatherspoons was such that they usually got the man they wanted. But right now what was in my mind was a horse of a different color. Only two days ago George had come to me with the admission that he'd actually plotted old Lewt's murder. I hadn't told a soul about it and didn't aim to. Like all the other Weatherspoons I was now sliding out toward the end of a slippery limb, in case George had kept his threat.

We aren't killers, we Weatherspoons, and until my handsome thirty-year old cousin had come to me with his confession and I thought I'd banished the evil contemplations from his mind, you couldn't've made me believe it—to believe big George would harm a fly.

The Bald Eagle tooted the Buick across Maroon's bridge. We could see pale-grey smoke making a drifting pall above a rambling white house. The gabled end was screened like a battleship in alien waters. The sun fell slantwise through the wispy veil and danced in serpentine colors on the windows. George was standing at the gate, and he let us in. His blue eyes met mine, locked, and I had trouble whipping my gaze away.

There's one thing about a killing in the country, it always draws an audience. In no time at all a crowd drops down from nowhere in particular. It seems in a placid community the residents can smell blood for miles.

THE corpse was in the kitchen. Molly was all broken up. Her brother-in-law, Jed Harris, short, chunky, with a red beard on his chin, was trying to console her. Nellie, her sister, Jed's wife, was there, too. She had all the beauty in the family.

Old Lewt sprawled on his face. He'd knocked over the kitchen table, crashing down after he was hit after trying hard to stand up. He'd been shot twice. The ugly blue holes

were not an inch apart, smack through the center of the forehead, one below the other. There was a sparkling web of blood on the white oilcloth. This hinted that he'd been seated there, when shot by someone who'd stood directly opposite him. But there were no powder burns.

"I swear I never saw two bullet holes so close together like them," the sheriff drawled. He straightened up, joggled to the phone on his lithe quick legs, and rang Central. He called the coroner. Then, after a fruitless effort to find the gun, we went out in the back yard.

A funny situation developed right quick. Molly had been visiting her sister Nellie Harris who lived down the road a quarter. George was plowing in the west forty. Jed Harris was over at Briley's Church putting shingles on a new roof. So there had been no eyewitnesses to the murder of old Lewt. And, nobody was able to supply a motive.

I kept thinking of what my cousin George had told me. You know it's pretty hard to drive poison like that from your brain. George knew that I had his secret. But he knew that I was a Weatherspoon and that his secret was as safe as if locked in a tomb.

But I wondered, as the tall wide-shouldered sheriff and I stamped over the rough terrain, if already the Bald Eagle had begun to suspect George Weatherspoon. He was acting funny. Besides, the countryside was full of rumors of the strained relationship of my cousin and his wealthy father-in-law.

George had been plowing all right. His fat bay team was still hitched to a hedge fence post, where he'd left them on hearing the gunshots. He'd raced to the house to discover old Lewt stone-dead, and not a sign of a soul around the residence.

The Bald Eagle stood picking his teeth with a gold-rimmed quill. His dome glistened in the late May sun as he removed his lippy wool hat. He scratched a blue jaw and his brown eyes came to rest reflectively upon my sweating countenance. It was warm for May.

"George is a good farmer," he said gently. "I'm only wondering how loud that gun sounded. It's quite a piece over there to the house."

I planted my elbows on the top of a hedge post and sighed wearily. "You're not suspecting George of lying, are you, Jim? I've known him a long time."

He wagged his shaggy black head, shaggy because of the ring of unbarbered hair that clung to three sides of his skull. "Yes and no. I—" he paused, and I saw strange glints pop out of his heavy-lidded, elongated eyes—"Nate—it's too bad you're deputy sheriff right now. Of course there mayn't be a danged thing to my suspicions. I'm just thinking it's

funny he could hear so far away from where the gun was fired."

I didn't resent his words. If I had he'd never have guessed by looking at my face. I'm small, thin, wiry and the weather's put a bushel of lines in my face. I could move them a little and shift from one expression to another without much effort. I wondered what made him suspect my cousin George.

WHEN we returned to the tall rambling farmhouse George was sitting on the stone well curb, his square chin on a grimy palm. The house was cooled by shady elms, their gloom deep and silky. The Bald Eagle trudged past George, without speaking. I waited till he'd crossed the screened-in porch and entered the kitchen. Then I sat down beside my cousin George.

I picked up a blade of grass and stuck it between my teeth. George was breathing hard. Sweat was coagulated around his blue denim-clad shoulders. His deep-set eyes were somber, brooding.

"George," I said in a low voice, "did you change your mind?"

He didn't speak. His silence was that of the Weatherspoons in an exacting situation.

"I'd rather you didn't tell me," I said succinctly. "But—" I was aware of his brooding gaze fastening itself on the silver star on my vest. That star made a difference. He knew it wasn't one Weatherspoon talking to another Weatherspoon. It was a Weatherspoon talking to an officer of the law.

But George's deep silence struck cold apprehension to my heart. His eyes now glinted as though they'd turned to sharpened steel. He said tersely, "Don't you ever bring that up—what I told you. It would hang me. I don't know why—why in God's name I ever made a clean breast of everything to you! I—" He choked, covered his face quickly with his hand.

Rattling into the yard was the grey dead-wagon from the Mason City morgue. The red sun stained the windowed walls. Two white-clad men clambered out, one removed a wicker-basket from the tonneau. He poked a canvas-shroud under his arm. The other attendant joined him and they strode into the kitchen.

George sat up, with a swishing sound coming from his lungs. In the cloying silence it was like air escaping from a giant balloon. "I can't bear to see them take him away," he admitted sorrowfully. "Although it's the truth—we never got along!"

IT WAS perhaps twenty minutes later when the corpse was removed. We'd managed to disperse the crowd. The Bald Eagle came out of the house and let the screen door

slam at his back. He had a glass of milk in his hand. He was sipping it. A piece of crimson oilcloth fastened to the screen door flapped crazily in the wind.

"Nate," he said, "I reckon we'll stay out here a while. I've talked to several of Lewt's neighbors and his daughters. It's a downright funny case. I just haven't decided what I want to do."

A man came from the house, stopped behind him. He was tall, cadaverous-looking. He wore a grey spring suit and his straw sailor hat had a bright blue band around it—but those colors didn't bring him to life. He was a walking dead man. I knew Banker Juspus Parrish. He was the leader in community affairs, the Big Stick, some called him. He swiveled his weirdly glowing eyes on George's perspiring face.

"George," Parrish said, "you talkin'?"

"Why should I talk?" George's voice rasped like a file on steel. "Just what have I to talk about? He's dead. I heard the gunshots out there in the west forty where I was plowing. When I reached the house I figured he'd killed himself. Then when I couldn't find the gun I changed my mind."

The Bald Eagle slowly drank his milk. He set the glass down on the well curb. The bottle flies were bad. He brushed one off the tip of his flat nose. "You came by the office early this morning and told me your father-in-law was acting funny," the sheriff said. "But you didn't explain in detail just what you meant."

I watched George's face intently—nothing showed. He mopped sweat from his brow with a soiled blue bandanna. "He was worried about something and he wouldn't eat. Molly and I talked about it. She knew him better than I—understood him. She was alarmed. For two days he didn't eat enough to keep him alive."

The sheriff's Indian eyes sharpened on the banker's corpsy face. "What did you mean when you asked George if he was going to talk?" he demanded.

"Just what I said," Parrish remonstrated. "Everybody in the neighborhood knows George Weatherspoon killed Lewt—for his money!"

In moments like that you get a crazy feeling. You figure something will happen, that anything can happen; and when it doesn't, you wonder why. George just stood there a moment, swallowing hard and wagged his head.

"I'm not saying anything," he stated bluntly, "back to you, Parrish. You're a big man. You know how to get things done. I reckon you'll have me in jail before night."

The Bald Eagle bristled up. "Hell," he rapped, "nobody's goin' to tell me who to arrest, George. Not even Mr. Parrish. I don't

take orders from nobody. If I find enough evidence against you, you're damned well right I'll haul you in. If I don't—"

That settled it. I saw Parrish's dead face flicker to life, but it only lived a moment.

"I'm going to say my piece," he expostulated. "Take it or leave it. Lewt Marlin was worth one hundred thousand dollars. Split this between two people and they get fifty thousand each, fifty for George and fifty for Jed Harris. Enough to tempt any young fellow. I guess Lewt's cold cash amounts to forty-five thousand or thereabouts. He didn't have any of it loaned out. And there's another thing. We all know George didn't get along with him."

"That," the Bald Eagle answered coolly, "has nothing to do with the case, right now. What we've heard doesn't prove George Weatherspoon killed Lewt Marlin. I'm inclined to believe he didn't for that very reason. He knew he'd be suspected."

"Lewt was shot in a heat of anger," Parrish said coldly, his voice sounded like it was coming from a crypt in the morgue. He aimed a long meatless finger at the Bald Eagle. "You're afraid of the Weatherspoons because of their voting strength. I know what's ailing you."

Again I saw those glints pop from the Bald Eagle's dark Indian eyes. "You shut your damned mouth," he said. "I'm not taking your insults, Parrish. If you're not careful, by heaven, I'll put you in jail for trying to whip up a murder charge against a man who can be innocent!"

Parrish hid his dead face, stomped away. I saw the windshield of his car glistening among the greening branches of the elms.

"NATE," the Bald Eagle said as we sat down on the vine-clad front porch, "you know something? This marks the second murder that's taken place out here on this same farm. Twenty-five years ago, before Lewt Marlin bought this place, Jeannie Smith was shot to death through a bedroom window. She was one of the most

popular girls in the community, as pretty as a hand-tinted photograph. I was deputy sheriff then. We scoured the country then, but we couldn't find anyone to put the crime on, so as to make it stick."

I nodded, lit a cigarette. The sun was sinking in flamboyant skies, lavender and gold and azure veils, all the hues of a rainbow right after a summer shower. I remembered the case.

"Jeannie Smith was Jed Harris' step sister, you remember. Your brother-in-law was a lot younger, only a small boy. The girl was shot with a .38. We didn't have ballistics experts like we do now out in this country, and even if we'd had them they would've done no good. We couldn't find the gun. We had several suspects in mind, but we couldn't prove anything on them."

I wondered why he'd brought up the Smith case, but I didn't say anything. He didn't go on about it, just let it drop. We got up, walked around the house and found Jed Harris seated on the well curb with a cider jug between his feet. He was sure down in the dumps. His red hair matched the sun's burning reflections on the windows. He wore blue overalls and a white carpenter's apron from one of the town's lumberyards.

The sheriff kept quiet. We walked back out to the west forty and found George Weatherspoon unhitching his bay team from the hedge fence post. He paused, wiped sweat, and looked unflinchingly at the Bald Eagle. He seemed to think the sheriff had come to arrest him.

"I can't find nothin' against you yet, George," the Bald Eagle said. "But I'm figuring you haven't told me all you know."

George nodded, hooked the lines around his left elbow and said morosely, "You're right, sheriff. I haven't. I was afraid to. I guess now, since thinking it over, I can explain without being misunderstood. You stood up for me against Parrish, and I'm not uneasy any more about not getting a fair deal. You



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come on up to the house and I'll tell you what I've been holding back."

He drove the heavy team through a gate, to the barnlot. We watched him in speculative silence, the Bald Eagle picking his teeth with the gold-rimmed quill. I saw the sheriff's puzzled gaze rest on the gleaming white farm house as if he was again trying to figure if a gunshot fired up there could be heard where we were standing.

We sauntered back across the field to the house. Jed Harris still sat on the well curb. It didn't seem that he had moved. I didn't like the man, had never liked him. He was sullen, a positive character who liked to argue. He'd start an argument any time, any place, and he'd get sore as hell if the argument went against him. He was well informed on current topics, subscribed to magazines and newspapers and devoured them thoroughly. He was quick-tempered as some red-headed folk are.

I saw the Bald Eagle glance at him as he led the way to the house, across the screened-in porch. By now I was so uneasy about cousin George I dreaded to think of what was coming.

We sat down in silence to wait for him. When he came in he smiled faintly, went straight to the kitchen sink and washed. He even took time to comb his hair. But the Bald Eagle didn't say anything to him. Finally he came over and sat down at the table, on the opposite side from us. He planted his elbows on the table and gazed reflectively at the sheriff.

"TWO weeks ago," he prefaced slowly, "I was plowing in the west forty where I was working when I heard those gunshots in here. Well, I turned over a furrow and my right foot hit something. I stopped the team and clawed it out of the dirt. It was an old revolver.

"I took it up to the barn and examined it. The gun was a thirty-eight, rusted and the chamber had four cartridges in it that hadn't been discharged. I figured when I got around to it I'd take some oil and clean it up!"

I was watching the Bald Eagle's broad, intelligent profile. I saw something jerk to life and quiver like it was determined not to die. A trembling came to his stout, brown hands which were clasped on the table. Before I knew it he was gunning questions at George.

"Where's the gun now? I've every reason to want that gun. What did you do with it? Maybe it was the weapon in your father-in-law's murder. Did you tell anyone about finding it?"

"Yes, I showed it to Lewt and he expressed a deep interest in it, he told me not to tell anyone I'd found it and he watched me hide

it in the haymow. We agreed to forget it."

"Did you handle it with your bare hands?"

"I most certainly didn't," George said. "Nor did Lewt. We both had on gloves, as I did when I turned it up in the furrow. And it was wrapped in a small piece of burlap. I don't think anyone has ever touched it, since I found it, with bare hands, unless the killer used it."

If the roof had tumbled in on me right then I wouldn't've noticed it. I would've numbly crawled out from under the debris, if able, without my mind working at all.

It was at least ten minutes before I realized that the Bald Eagle and cousin George had stopped talking. The concluding remarks made by the sheriff dealt with how George had gone to the barn and found the old revolver missing. This signified that, as the Bald Eagle had said, the old revolver was the weapon of murder. But the sheriff had something else on his mind, too. He thought maybe it was the same gun that had killed Jeannie Smith twenty-five years ago and that the killer had buried it in the west forty where it had turned up.

"We must find that gun," the Bald Eagle said to me. "We'll scour every inch of this place. Damn it, it'll have to turn up if we look hard enough!"

And it was the sheriff who found it. In the most unlikely of all places, under the mattress on George Weatherspoon's bed. Evidently the culprit had planted it there to frame my cousin, or—I couldn't bear the thought that George had been stringing us along, and was the real killer himself.

Before we left the house the sheriff told George to be at his office bright and early the next morning. We rode to town in silence. The Bald Eagle had taken the precaution to wrap the gun in a handkerchief just in case there should be incriminating fingerprints on it.

WE HAD one of the best ballistics experts in the country over at Central Station on Mary Street, off Jule. After the bald sheriff had turned the gun over to the lab man, we returned to his office. In the files were the records of the Smith case, along with some old newspapers that had begun to turn yellow. The Bald Eagle fished these out of the green file cabinets, and was poring over them when I gave up and went home to spend a restless night, to dream that George was hanged for his father-in-law's murder.

When I went back to the office the next morning the room—which was decorated in cotton bunting and with flags because the Bald Eagle's two sons were fighting Japs and he was a veteran of the other war himself—was crammed full of people. Jed Harris came in a moment after my arrival. The bald sheriff was in the back office, a little room reserved

for private transactions. He came out, greeted me and grabbed those old records and clippings from the file-box. Then he took my elbow and walked me into the little room. Turning quickly, he locked the door.

A shadow moved furtively against the open window and scared a woodpecker off the sill. The streaming sun lighted up the shadow's face. Banker Jussup Parrish stood towering over the Bald Eagle like a corpse that had risen from a casket.

"See here, I've work at the bank," Parrish grunted. "If you've any further business with me—"

"I've got plenty of business with you." The Bald Eagle's voice rasped like a new hinge. "There's no use beating around the bush. I might as well come right out with it. You killed Lewt Marlin!"

Jussup Parrish drew back, startled, but his yellowish face and sunken-in temples remained dead. His weird, glowing eyes roamed swiftly and apprehensively about the room.

The Bald Eagle went on mercilessly: "You can't deny it now. George told Lewt about the gun, and Lewt took it out of the barn. He called you on the phone. The operator heard the call, listened in. He told you to come there at once, if you knew what was good for you. Lewt knew about the Smith murder, because he was one of the suspects who was going with Jeannie Smith at the time of her death. He was exonerated because he had a bomb-proof alibi."

"What's that got to do with me?" Parrish snarled. "See here—what're you trying to do?"

"You were one of the suspects in the Smith case," The Bald Eagle resumed feverishly. "But we couldn't get anything on you, although you failed to account for one hour of your time on the night of the murder. But your picture's in one of these old papers. You were engaged to marry the girl. Later, according to your own testimony taken from the files, the engagement was broken off, because she'd changed her mind. The reason she quit you was because she'd decided to marry Lewt Marlin."

Nothing came from the spooky banker, not even did he seem to breathe. He was crouched against the wall, as thin as a dark shadow, as motionless as the wall itself.

"You went out there yesterday," the sheriff continued coldly now, "and found that George Weatherspoon had found the gun you used to kill Jeannie Smith. You're plenty smart, but you made one mistake. You didn't wear gloves the first time or the last time. You planted the gun under the mattress on George's bed, figuring I'd uncover it and arrest him for Lewt's murder. But the last time, yesterday, you had thick cream on your fingers. You

must've stopped to take a drink of cream-milk with Lewt. You left a fresh impression on the gun, along with those old prints.

"Lewt recognized it as your gun. You'd run around with him until you two fell out over Jeannie Smith. Those files disclose how you had a thirty-eight revolver but claimed it had been stolen from you. Lewt testified he'd seen you with the thirty-eight. Because of your reputation in the community you were given the benefit of the doubt, which wouldn't happen now. I remember I was deputy then and wanted to arrest you on suspicion.

"Well," the bald sheriff concluded cryptically, "I guess this clinches it. You see, Parrish, in those days they didn't have ballistics out here like the experts we have now. No fingerprints. We didn't have any lab at all. And your fingerprints were found on the gun, both fresh ones and old ones, and those are conclusive because you're the only one who's handled the gun without gloves. Yeah, the only incriminating prints on the weapon of those murders, Parrish—are yours!"

I SAW him moving away from the wall, in the wake of the Bald Eagle's condemning words. I pushed forward. The sun was in my eyes. I knew from where the sheriff stood, he couldn't see Jussup Parrish groping for the gun in his hip pocket. But before the metal flashed in the light I'd shoved the bald sheriff back against the wall.

Lunging, I felt for the corpse-like man's right wrist, missed, and was pawed away. He pounded me back against the door with his left fist. Now his right hand cleared his pocket. As I closed in again, the gun thundered in front of me. Cordite spewed from the bore in wisps that blinded me—sharp, pungent cordite. I felt the slug graze my head, taking some hair with it. For a moment I was stunned.

It was the Bald Eagle who acted, probably just in time. He slammed a chair into the banker's thin legs.

Parrish stumbled, plunged down over it. The gun roared again, spitting flame and lead into the low ceiling. The Bald Eagle jumped, came down with both heels twisting into the bones of the banker's right hand. I heard the sickening crunch. A groan came from the figure slumped down across the overturned chair.

Well, you'll find enough Weatherspoons in our county to vote the Bald Eagle in for the rest of his life—and we have little ones coming along all the time. I guess they'll vote for one of the two sons the Bald Eagle has over there fighting, when they come home and run for sheriff, when the Bald Eagle retires. At least we keep coaching them, you know, sort of feeding them on Bald Eagle propaganda.



**By
Martin
Eden**

Then the yellow lights came around the curve. . . .

There was no harm in Charlie Fletcher—wine, song, and one woman was all he wanted. The melody was old—but the words read:

LET ME KILL YOU, SWEETHEART



YOU had to admit it was clever. You had to admit it was never done before. And, after admitting it, you had to say only a bright guy could dream it up. That's what they all said. And maybe that was the cleverest part of it. . . .

Because Charlie Fletcher couldn't be classed as bright. Strictly a schoolboy, even though he was pushing forty. Fletch never earned a buck he didn't sweat for. No flash. No big words. Quite the other way. Just a humdrum ticket agent working for the railroad. No harm in Charlie Fletcher, poor old Fletch. Anybody'd tell you that, of course.

You'd always see him in shirtsleeves in that cage at the rail station. Forever stooped over catalogues and complicated schedules. You felt sorry for Fletch; he was such a slight

fellow. Didn't ever fill out a vest; got most of his shoulders with the suit. Small, he'd have to get off his heels to mail a letter.

But a good guy.

Too bad he wouldn't step out with the boys more. Too bad he wouldn't get some open air job, get some blood in his face. Yeah. Too bad.

That doll was too much for Fletch even though she was years past her prime. She was too fast, had too much glitter. You saw the pictures. Long, soft, red hair fell to her shoulders. Her eyes were large, deep brown, but cold. Inviting lips said, *Kiss me, kiss me.* Fletch should have taken a closer look. He'd have read a different meaning there. *Kiss me, Sucker.*

Wonder how he met that redhead? Maybe

she walked up to the wicket and said, "Hello." Maybe she smiled and looked at him. Because the other girls hardly ever smiled.

Still, it never could add up. She needed money he never had and would never earn. The clothes she wore hollered Fifth Avenue. The funny little hats alone used up a hard day's pay. That's what made Fletch buy the gun and the bullets. Somebody should have seen it begin to boil and stopped it. A couple of lives could have been saved that way. Only Fletch spoke so little, in the first place. Almost like he was afraid to let people hear what he was thinking.

Even Brady was fooled. The chunky detective had a pink round face, not much hair, but a pleasant grin that took that misfortune lightly. He'd drop in out of the cold many a night to chew the fat with Fletch. A smart clue-hound—yet he never guessed what was going on.

"Say, Fletch," he'd say. "When are you going to wise up? Grab a job that pays off and scram out of that cage. Out in the open some place."

Fletch always shook his head sadly. "Nope. I'm all right here, Brady. That's okay for you muscle boys. I don't rate that kind of work. Say, I thought you liked me. Why send me out on a job that would put me in my grave?"

"But—"

"Nothing doing, Brady."

"Fletch, I'm telling you like a friend. There's better money on other jobs. You're losing years in this musty dump. The trains grind on your brain day after day—"

"No," Fletch insisted. "I'm content here. Never did run after money like most guys do. Guess I'm as high as old Fletch will ever be. Why, I'd be afraid of those night jobs, Brady. Can't tell who's walking around nights these days."

Brady finally gave up.

But look carefully at what Charlie Fletcher said. Observe the facts he put into the mind of a city detective. Cast an eye upon the reputation Charles Fletcher, humble ticket agent, was building.

I'm too weak for harder toil. I don't want money, never cared for it. I'm happy doing this. I'm afraid to walk around at night.

Brady never dreamed it was all canny play-acting; just a pose. Nobody guessed that the thin hand he offered so quickly for a handshake often dipped into the till. Nobody, except the redhead. And she didn't care.

EVERYTHING was a plant. Even the nice way he greeted you, bowing almost, speaking softly. And always ready to help out a friend. Like if you needed a letter written or a speech. Fletch had a wonderful handwriting and a way with words.

He was proud of this ability. He let everybody see samples of his precise, even script. Even Brady. Particularly Brady. A good touch, that.

Brady couldn't know what was brewing. Not then. He didn't know that murder was in the air. It was still hidden, like a dagger in a sheath. You couldn't blame Brady. Nobody else in the town could see that dagger, either.

Not even Joe, the noisy bus driver, could see. He was the only other man who spent much time with Fletch. He was a good-natured guy, with a second helping of chin and little, merry eyes that loved to see a beer overflow. Always had a grin on his face, even after wrestling a heavyweight bus down a highway eight hours a night.

But Joe talked too much. They all said he'd some day talk himself to death. They weren't far wrong about that. But Joe was that way whether it was beer or coffee he was drinking.

"Say, Fletch," he said one time, wrapping a thick hand around one of the bars of the ticket grill.

"Eh?" Fletch wished he would go away. He didn't want to talk to anybody now. He wanted to think. He wanted to think of a way out.

What had to happen had exploded in his face the night before. He was breaking up inside because of the redhead. She'd given it to him straight—straight where he lived. She was tossing him out because he was broke. Like an old shoe there was no fun kicking around any more. She told him she wanted money. She told him to get out and stay out if he couldn't get it. And she'd only given him a couple of weeks to come through. That's what put the sweat on his face.

"Say, what's the matter with you, Fletch?"

"I'm okay, Joe," he corrected quickly. "Nothing bothering me."

"But you look sick or somp'n', Fletch."

"Sick. Oh, yeah—that's it. I feel a little sick, Joe, that's all."

He mopped at his face. A lot of tenners were thick in the till under his eyes. He couldn't take his eyes off that money.

Joe was saying, ". . . so I had to take this here new route. From the war plant to the railroad here. I don't mind, even if it does mean night driving in the sticks. I got the highway to myself."

"Eh? New route, Joe?" Fletch asked mechanically.

"Yeah. Bunch of women war workers that knock off at one ayem. They had to charter a bus for them—special. Say, you oughta hear those dames on a Saturday night with all that pay in their kicks. Forty of them and not a one gets less than fifty bucks a week. Well, got to run. Hope you feel better."

Joe always did talk too much.

Fletch must have added it up. He must have written it down on scratch paper in that perfect hand of his. He must have liked what it totaled. Fifty bucks to each girl. Forty girls to the bus. Okay then, you went to school. Forty times fifty.

That's two thousand bucks. That's a pot of gold overnight. You stay months in a cage for two thousand bucks. Two thousand bucks. That buys a lot of hats. That makes Fifth Avenue holler.

Maybe he didn't think of doing it right away. Nobody knows for sure. The redhead was driving him crazy. Watching her, wanting her, afraid of losing her. The way she smiled, the way she walked. Despite the years her figure was still pin-up. It would always bring a whistle. Once upon a time it probably could have made a lot of men break in or out of jail.

Still, it was a low thing to do.

You've got to tip your hat to a girl war worker. She plugs away, hour after hour, night after night, in grease and in grime, getting the fighting stuff made. The fifty bucks keep her going for the next week of back-breaking nights. She needs that fifty bucks. The last thing you do is stick a gun in her face and tell her to fork it over.

But Fletch didn't think that way. He forgot about the little people. That's how it is when a guy's heart turns crooked. He was only thinking of himself.

Okay then. . .

IT BEGAN with a few hints. He needed a vacation, he said. He'd visit Florida, get some sun on his face. It would only be a short ride but that was what he needed. Nobody thought that was strange. He let a week pass and then the day came, a Saturday. His train pulled in at night so he had to say his good-bys in the afternoon. And nobody could see him off. The town didn't think that was strange, either.

"Don't forget to write me, Fletch," Brady said, when Fletch dropped in at headquarters. "And watch yourself on that old rattler. Don't stand in between the cars or you'll be flung off. I know that train. Should have been junked long ago. The war—"

"I'll take care. And you'll get the letter, Brady."

Damn right he would get it. Fletch went straight to his room and wrote it. Carefully. The lettering must be undeniably his. Because it might have to stand up in court.

The next part was easy. He kept ducked out of sight until the train pulled in. All he had to do was give his train ticket and the letter to someone who wasn't lucky enough to get train space. Plenty of those guys

around. But, of course, he'd ask a favor for a favor. He'd tell the guy how important it was that his letter be mailed from the South. He'd give him a story about a nagging wife he was trying to get rid of. Somebody would fall for it.

Somebody did. Late that night the letter was on the train headed south.

The bitter cold weather didn't faze him. He turned the collar of his worn grey coat up around his ears. He saw his fingers had the jitters. But that would pass. Fletch reached into a deep patch pocket for the touch of his .45. There were five bullets in the clip. Each one could blow a hole in a man big enough to shove your fist through.

Fletch lowered his head against the buffeting wind and started to walk. The raw cold washed the strain of waiting from his brain. Besides, it wouldn't be long. This was it. It was time. Time to meet the redhead.

He walked the half mile to the out of the way meeting place rapidly. The streets were deserted. There was only the prowling, savage wind, roaring. Two gloved fingers clamped on his hat brim, worked to keep it there.

He found her waiting. She'd been fidgeting behind the wheel of the black roadster for ten minutes. She saw him first. He stopped and stared at her. She motioned him over, her hand like a scoop, digging the air angrily.

He hastened to her. The car door lolled on its hinges. He hauled it shut after him. "What's the matter, Rusty?"

"You're dumb, Fletch." She spurred the motor to life. "Why'd you stand out there, gawking like a kid at a circus? Want someone to see you? Remember you should be miles away?"

"Nobody saw me, Rusty," Fletch said. "And the guy's going to mail the letter the minute he gets there." He wet his lips. "Did you bring the black hat and gloves?"

"Yes." Her painted mouth wasn't so inviting now. "The hat is initialed J. D. When it's over, you let the wind have it. Maybe the police will find it and chase the wild goose." She laughed a little. "I like to give the blue-coats something to worry about."

Fletch tossed his own hat and gloves on the back seat. The black one with the phoney initials was a good enough fit. He took the matching gloves from the dashboard compartment. He tugged them on.

"Okay, Rusty," he said. "Where's the satchel?"

"At your feet. It's open. You know what to do. Toss it to the driver. Don't say a word. That Joe will know your voice. If he gives you any wise talk, let the forty-five answer him back. That gives you the last word."

"Yeah," Fletch said.

They were getting there. The lights of

the town twinkled far behind. The racing car was tearing the wind in two.

"I made more plans, Fletch," Rusty said suddenly. Then she let him wait till she was good and ready to tell him. She knew he was sitting on needles but she let him wait. Stuff like that should have told Fletch he couldn't trust her. But there's no fool like a fool in love. He had to learn the hard way.

Finally she spoke, "I've got a hotel room in New York all picked out and waiting. That's where we'll go while the police run their legs off."

"New York? Lose ourselves in the crowd, eh, Rusty?"

"There's something else, Fletch. Something that's got to be attended to. In the morning you run down and buy some papers, find out what they're thinking. I'll see about picking up another car." She paused. "You're a man, Fletch. They all think you're nobody, but you've got guts. You do things to a woman."

"Nobody," Fletch said. "They all thought I was nobody. But, maybe I didn't outsmart them! Maybe this town won't be in a daze after tonight!"

She patted his hand, moved a little closer to him. "That's better, Fletch. You make a girl feel safer, honey—even doing a thing like this."

The roadster was a black wedge in the wind. They made a few turns, hit the main highway. The redhead twisted the wheel with two hands. They reached a hairpin in the road. The concrete burned the whirling rubber as she applied the brakes. The wheels were still but the redhead let the motor purr.

"Nothing better than this turn," she said. Her mouth twisted. "The bus will have to stop and crawl around."

"Yeah," Fletch said. He hopped out into the cold.

The .45 was poised, safety on, the handle lost in one black glove. Fletch's other hand held the dangling satchel by three lower fingers. Thumb and forefinger kept the hat from the wind.

He struggled to the other side of the hairpin turn, his body slanted against the gale. A road sign warned, **FULL STOP**. Fletch squinted at his watch. He'd have a five-minute wait, if he'd figured right. He grinned. If Joe had figured right.

HE DIDN'T see the bus first. He heard the roar of the motor. Then the yellow lights rounded into sight.

It was a creaking heavyweight, only a couple of years from the graveyard, but it came fast, all right. Twin cones of light sped down, cutting widening swaths of yellow into the blackness.

The curve lay like a broken toothpick on

the highway. Joe hit the brakes with a heavy foot. The vehicle slowed to a moaning crawl.

Fletch ducked behind the sign. He waited for it to stop. He didn't wait long.

The moaning crawl threw a shadow on him. That was the last thing he waited for.

He darted onto the highway, the .45 tilted and roaring. The explosions put an ache in his brain. But two well aimed bullets ripped the front tires into a hissing, sagging ruin of rubber. Joe twisted in the driver's seat like he'd caught the lead. His pelican jowls shook. A panic of screams and scrambling broke loose in the bus. Joe hauled the folding doors open.

His face was a frightened white; his little eyes bugged. The gun in Fletch's fist moved. It drew a threatening line from Joe's face down to his belt. And up again. Joe had a duck's eye view. Fletch tossed the open satchel at him. Then he jerked his head toward the girls. The gesture said, get going.

So far, no hitch. The girls were too scared to do much more than breathe. They couldn't see him because of the dark and the black hat pulled halfway down his face. And he hadn't said a word to remember him by.

Joe caught the satchel. He shifted it around in his fat hands like it was on fire. He dropped it and picked it up again. Fletch lifted the gun to his face, dropped the safety.

Joe turned to the girls in a kind of daze. He stumbled up the silent aisle, collecting the money. Fifty bucks apiece. Outside, Fletch moved along the length of the bus. The gun never left Joe's face.

The satchel filled. Joe moved back to the head of the vehicle. The gun moved with him.

Fletch jammed his hands together. That meant close the satchel. Joe obeyed, his eyes hanging on the gun. Fletch felt himself go crazy inside. There was plenty in that satchel. Maybe a girl was smart with a bill or two but he'd get the lion's share.

Maybe he was thinking too hard on the money. Maybe Joe saw his eyes leave watching his face, study the satchel. Maybe the little man with the gun seemed off balance for a minute.

The girls say he let out a bellow when he did it. All the rage in his heart went into that one terrible shout. He balanced the satchel above and behind him in one fluid motion. There was two hundred pounds behind the heave.

It missed. By inches.

The .45 did a death jig in Fletch's fist. Once, twice. Joe stopped the slugs with his chest. It stopped his breathing. He doubled over, holding at the blood. He did a floundering half circle before he died. His legs died first. His dead face hung over the top step of the

bus. The girls screamed, gasped, whimpered.

Fletch scooped up the satchel. His hat tore off his head as he raced for the car. He let it go. It was supposed to go.

The car was rolling, door open as he legged it into sight. Fletch leaped in, hauled it shut. The redhead pedaled speed into the motor. The black car was away, unseen, one minute after the bus driver died.

FLETCH bought the morning papers in New York. All of them. He was a headline, for the first time in his life. The crime made a good story. A picture of the dead driver was on page one of the tabloids.

None of the girls could begin to describe the killer. They even differed on which hand held the gun. The police, teeming around the scene, had found the black hat. And the fish had taken the bait. They hunted a mysterious J. D. who wore a size 7 hat. Perfect. Not his initials. Not his size.

A new angle had developed. They were checking up on released convicts known to be in the surrounding area. If the initials and hat-size checked with any one of them, the exon would be in a mess of trouble.

Fletch must have felt pretty good then. He must have thought he was a man with a lot of brains and a lot of guts. He must have thought he should have done something like this long ago—instead of burying himself in a cage.

He was way ahead of them. In proper time he'd come back, talk about a nice girl he'd met on his vacation. He'd go back to the old drudgery for a while, then quit to settle down with the girl in her home state. No harm in doing a thing like that. No harm at all.

He must have run back to the redhead with his heart singing in his chest. He barged into the hotel room waving the good news, bubbling over about the good times they'd have. They were a perfect combination. They were a smart combination.

But the room was empty. The redhead was gone. The satchel was gone, too.

That must have torn the heart out of Fletch. He may have even wept a little. He may have felt sort of sick about Joe, with his life pouring out of his chest. He must have sat on the bed, holding his temples, and tried to figure it out. But it didn't add up. Not for him.

The redhead had left in a hurry. Some of her things were strewn about. Her this. Her that. He picked them up to throw them somewhere out of sight. He found it then—the little folded note. It fell out of a pocket of a shabby blouse.

It wasn't really a note, just a notation. An inked reminder of Steve Raymond, 1312 Knox Place. New York City. No phone number.

HE MUST have shuffled along with the big city crowds for days, thinking.

But he had only so much time. With his vacation over, he'd have to be in the old cage, or Brady would be asking questions, letter or no letter.

He rode into town on a bus. He had an explanation for that ready. Some obliging fellow traveler had driven him back by private car.

Brady was in the cage when Fletch walked over. They exchanged greetings and started some small talk. Brady mentioned the holdup and killing he'd missed.

"Funny," he said. "You're in this town ten years, Fletch, and nothing happens. You go away and there's a murder."

Fletch didn't say a thing. He waited for the conversation to drift around to his letter. He was on needles, waiting for that.

Brady obliged at last. "Got your letter, Fletch. Thanks. You're really okay with words, Fletch. You described the scenery the train passed through just like I once saw it."

"Yeah," Fletch said. "I had a lot of time on that train, you know. So I wrote about the places as I saw them."

Brady moved half a step backward. He flexed his shoulders. This was what he was waiting for. He shot a look at the boys standing guard at the doors. And reached into a back pocket to pull out the letter.

He spoke slowly. "You know, Fletch, I once took a trip on that old rattler myself. I promised my wife I'd write her a letter just like you promised me. I tried to do it, but I couldn't. The rattler shook so much, Fletch. It's impossible to write ordinary script on that train, let alone neat lettering like this!"

Fletch shot a startled look around the station. The men at the doors were tense.

"You were never on that train, Fletch!" Brady said.

That was when Fletch did a funny thing. He went for his .45. He didn't have a chance, but he went for it. He tried to break out of the circle, the .45 wobbling in his fist.

Brady fired in self-defense. The .45 slid out of Fletch's hand. His bullet-shattered head hit face down, inches away from the ringing gun.

They traced the redhead through the note Fletch had taken from her blouse. They found her in Steve Raymond's apartment, dead, a bullet in her heart.

The strangest part was Fletch's .45—the weapon he'd tried to draw. It was empty. Even the clip was removed. He'd sent the last bullet into the redhead. But he'd made up his mind on how it would end. So when Brady showed him a death house invitation he pulled an empty gun.

You know why.

DEATH'S DARK DOORWAY

By Cyril Plunkett



*His hand
leaped from
the pocket,
with a gun....*

CURIOSLY enough, she was worried now mostly about Biff, her husband. She knew he could easily complicate everything tonight. Biff, whom Uncle Sam had long ago sworn into his navy, had freckles and red hair and a way of solving problems with his fists. Frontal attack, that was Biff. He would tower over Grayson.

The little gold cross was a symbol of eternal life—how could she know her killer wanted it to fuse the last link that would send him to the chair?

She shivered as she looked at Biff. The rushing night was no consolation. Rain splattered on the windshield. Strangely, trees were no longer marching with them on either side the pavement, were no longer straight and trim, but bare and gnarled and ugly. Shorham Road, despite its lawns, its drives, its splendid homes, seemed suddenly tight and narrow.

"Call my wife a thief, will he?" muttered Biff again. "What I want to know, what the devil is his angle? I mean here he is with dough like leaves falling in his lap, maybe half a million, but is the guy satisfied? Oh no, starts yapping right away about a pin, a cross worth maybe a hundred inflated dollars."

She fingered the cross pinned and glowing on her jacket. Her mistake, she knew now, was in having permitted herself the flare of quick—though righteous—anger. But the nerve of Cort Grayson! To phone her as he did, to say what he did, practically to accuse her of stealing a valuable keepsake from a patient.

She'd whirled from the phone to say to Biff, "Oh, so he doesn't believe his Aunt Veronica gave the cross to me? So he'll send his lawyer to see me, will he? He will not! If he'd had acted decently about it, he could have had his darned old keepsake. But now—I'm going right out there tonight, Biff Smith—"

Yes, she'd seen—then—her mistake. Biff had put down the paper he'd been reading; he'd got up. He'd grinned and kissed the knuckles of his left hand, and said softly, "Okay. Let's go, baby."

But why wouldn't she have flared? She was after all, a professional woman, a nurse. Cynthia Smith, R.N.—a Navy nurse, with two years of honorable service and an honorable discharge. Did Cort Grayson think that with Biff home on survivor's leave she'd wanted to special his aunt in her last illness? Did Cort Grayson think she'd enjoyed sitting in a hospital at his aunt's bedside, with Biff needing her and entitled to some relaxation?

"Oh, Biff," she said, "the shame of it. Practically calling me a thief. I'm so mad I—I could cry."

Now she looked at Biff, saw with apprehension the hard set of his chin. What would happen if he really struck Cort Grayson? She saw in her mind the swart and blocky Grayson; cold had been her word for him, his hooded eyes always black with calculation.

"Biff—" she said.

But they'd come at last to the great stone arch marked GRAYSON—PRIVATE. Biff took the turn fast, and the road dipped suddenly, into rugged country, into a ravine. There was a bridge ahead, a curve, and then the lane wound sharply upward. They saw the fine and stately white home that had become, by death, the property of Cort Grayson.

Biff got out of the car, big, broad beside the car as he held the door for her. "Biff—" she found his arm and gripped it—"I'll go in alone."

"Hah!" he said. His chest swelled beneath his jacket. "Come on, baby."

"But, darling, listen! You know how I feel. I—I'm mad. Biff, would you want the British Navy to clean up the Japs for you?"

"We'll take care of the Japs," Biff said softly.

"Darling, that's just it! Oh, Biff, if he needs a poke, I promise I'll call you."

He frowned. "Decks cleared?"

"All cleared, Biff."

"Won't run down the flag?"

"Why, Biff Smith—never!"

SO SHE went up the walk alone. The doorbell tinkled far off, hollowly, and she looked around. The silence and the blackness out here! She waved to Biff, to let him know that footsteps were approaching. Butler, maybe. How would she begin?

Tell Mr. Grayson I demand—

Surprisingly, Grayson himself opened the door. He saw the cross, the glow of it on her coat. "Oh, the nurse," he said. "Come in."

From the drive came two toots on the car horn. Biff's way of saying, "Courage!" She squared her shoulders and stepped into the hall.

She'd expected tight lips, or barbed words and a sneer. After all, he *had* said on the phone, "No, I cannot believe, Mrs. Smith, that my aunt would part with the cross voluntarily." But he wasn't like that at all now. He remained in the shadow of the hall as she passed beyond him, through velvet portieres, into a small bright room.

"Your husband is with you, Mrs. Smith?"

"Yes, he drove me—"

"Won't you ask him in?"

Biff, with both fists knotted. *You don't realize how glad you should be, she thought, that Biff is still outside.* No, she said, smiling a little. Biff would wait; she would not be long.

He snapped off the hall switch, drew the portieres, said quietly, "Then please sit down, Mrs. Smith."

It seemed awfully still suddenly. The room was breathless, watchful, cramped. She noticed then the window draperies—all drawn. And the doors, of course, were—all closed. Silly, she thought. *Biff's outside. Why am I uneasy?* The awkward moment passed as Grayson began.

"I'm terribly sorry if I sounded brusque and boorish on the phone tonight. Frankly, so much has happened—"

She felt herself relax. Yes, she understood. Yes, his Aunt Veronica's death was no doubt

a blow, and now there were affairs to settle; only today had arrangements been made for the funeral. The servants, too, he added, had been dismissed when poor Aunt Veronica had been taken to the hospital. Yes, she understood all this, and how one could become short and snappish.

Grayson paused to light a cigarette, then to watch glowingly its glow. "About the cross, Mrs. Smith," he continued. "It had a deep religious significance for both of us, my aunt and me."

This man was religious? From way back in her mind a finger seemed to raise itself in warning and in doubt.

"Then, too," he was saying, "it was something to which my aunt was especially attached. I recall many times when she was ill, she'd pin it to her pillow. She liked its phosphorescence, the fact that she could see it in the darkness. It gave her strength, she'd say, at night when she was fretful and lying alone in the darkness. Of course, and I repeat, I said the wrong thing on the phone. What I meant to say was, I don't believe she knew she was giving it to you. I hardly believe she'd have wanted you to have it when I—"

"But Mr. Grayson—"

He brushed aside her interruption. "So surely you can understand why I'd like to have the cross and keep it in the family."

He was using the word a lot, she thought. Understand. Didn't he understand it was his manner that had offended? That in view of his apology and this sane approach she'd give the cross to him—

Grayson, still speaking swiftly, was saying, "So let's approach it this way. Intrinsically there is no particular value—I doubt if you could even sell the cross. Suppose we forget everything that's been said; you return the cross to me, and I'll give you my check for one hundred dollars."

She realized she'd sat fingering the cross. That she'd been about to remove it from her coat. She realized suddenly that something had happened to it. She looked down, and her breath caught. *The cross had snapped open.*

FOR a moment she was breathless with embarrassment. To think she had broken the cross just at the time—it struck her only then that Grayson had stopped speaking.

Still, she knew that she should look up, smile and say, "Oh, I'm sorry!" But she couldn't smile and couldn't look up. Her gaze was fastened on the hollow tube revealed, and on what she saw in the tube. The cross wasn't broken. It was built to be opened, and secreted in it was a white powder.

She sat very still, and the pulses in her temples began pounding. A cry, like wind far

off, swept through her mind. She tried to close her eyes to all of this, not to see, to realize, but the barriers had already been broken. She shuddered, and her mind flashed back to the hospital, the sick room, room 723. To still night hours when she'd sat alone with Veronica Grayson—small hours just before the end.

The poor woman, she'd thought. All along she'd been naggingly aware of her patient's skin eruption.

Yes, the eruption had puzzled her from the first. True, Miss Grayson's other symptoms were typical. Apoplexy. A long history of hypertension; dizziness, mental disturbances; then, just before hospitalization, motor paralysis, and finally coma. So there was really no basis for questioning the doctor's diagnosis and yet—

Why the rash, she'd wondered, when Miss Grayson had received no medication? Was the rash but a simple erythema? The doctor apparently thought so. Why did he think so? Why had she jumped to the troubled conclusion this eruption was a medicamentous dermatitis?

The trouble with a drug rash was, it was never typical. The lesions produced by medicinal substances might cover the entire range of erythema; urticaria, purpura, eczema; pustular, bulbous and vegetative lesions. . . .

Still she sat, here, in Grayson's small tight room, fighting this memory and her pounding heart and the wheels that ran so fast now in her mind. Rash . . . powder . . . drug. It was like a dirge. It chanted in high and weird tones, in minors.

A drug producing symptoms that simulated cerebral hemorrhage. Secreted in the cross that Grayson wanted. That he wanted. That he wanted—because he had committed murder?

She raised her eyes at last, knowing they betrayed her, knowing they were wells of fear. His dark eyes were very small. Hooded and too bright, she thought. Gleaming like black little buttons. Suddenly the cross snapped back beneath her trembling fingers, and she said jerkily, at last, "I—I don't know yet if I'll part with it—"

Her heart began to beat upward in her throat, to stay, to clog there. He'd taken a step forward.

"I—I'll have to talk it over with my husband," she said.

He spat one word out, "Why?" And now he stood with one hand in his coat pocket. Now his black eyes shimmered and she began to shake her head, dumb, words lost upon her dry lips.

"So that's the way it is," he said. And his hand leaped from the pocket with a gun.

She stared, helpless.

A ROOSTER crowed. Here, off Shorham Road, at night like this. Of all things, she thought. A car raced on the high-road, she could hear its motor. But it didn't turn in here. Biff . . . so far away, so near. She tried to rise, but her legs refused to hold her. The walls, it seemed, had all moved in, and she drew a deep breath and it hurt.

"All right," Cort Grayson was saying in a cold, metallic voice. "The cards are down, I see. You've raised the stakes, I'll call you. Let's have your husband in."

"B-Biff," she stammered.

"Biff, eh?" Grayson's dark eyes narrowed. "All right. Walk slowly through the hall, back to the front door. I'll open it. And don't try to be clever. It won't work. Biff, eh? I want you to call out, 'Biff, will you come in a moment?'" Not another word, though, understand?"

He gestured with the gun. "All right, Mrs. Smith, get up and start walking."

She'd risen? She was on her two feet, mute and nodding? Nodding—when to call Biff was to sign his death warrant? She swayed a little as she passed the portieres, into the darkness of the hall. She'd known, of course, that Grayson wouldn't turn on the lights.

And then she thought, *Biff, what will I do? Oh Biff, how can I warn you?*

"Remember," Grayson said thinly, "don't try to be clever."

So near it was, the door. So soon they reached the door. He opened it, and now the time had come. She could see Biff in the drive, standing by the car. She could see him turn at the sound the door had made.

"Well?" Grayson whispered.

Her throat was tight and aching. "Biff," she called, "c-come in—"

Biff, come in—*fighting!* She'd been about to scream this last word, but there was no last word. The blow came from the darkness behind her, too suddenly; and she knew then, in one instantaneous flash, a terrible regret. She knew she would never call out to Biff again. And yet, so very queerly, she could see and hear, and it seemed that still she stood there by the door—although she knew she'd fallen—that she was looking sadly down, to one side, at her crumpled body. It seemed, despite the darkness, she could see—and feel—Cort Grayson's fingers tearing at her shoulder.

His speed! His urgency! Of course, the cross was what he wanted. To pin quickly to his own coat. To take from Biff the last small chance that he might have had. To use the glowing cross now to betray Biff. *Biff would*

see it and think it was she who stood waiting for him in the dark doorway.

She fought the black threat of unconsciousness. She fought to break through this numbness, to cry out, for by now Biff must surely be very, very near. Was that Grayson's sharp intake of breath? In anticipation? And Biff's voice, saying calmly, "Hon, I told you—"

There was a crack. Not the gun. It was Biff ramming the door! It was Biff, throwing Grayson off balance. "Biff, he's got a gun!" she tried to warn; and then she heard her piercing scream at last, shrill, without end. . . .

Her eyes opened to see Grayson lying on the floor very still; and the lights were on in the hall and Biff was kneeling beside her.

"Of course," she said to Biff, "Cort Grayson fed the drug—sulphonal, or something like that—to his Aunt Veronica. He wanted her money, and he knew the symptoms produced by the drug would simulate stroke. His one fear, naturally, was that the doctor would suspect and refuse a death certificate without autopsy. That's where the cross came in. It belonged to his aunt and was especially dear to her, remember. Dead, it would appear that she herself had brought the drug to the hospital, that she had taken her own life.

"If, however, the doctor didn't become suspicious, Grayson needed only to reclaim the cross and remove the powder. It was thus a terrible blow to him when his aunt gave the cross away."

She looked at Biff. Biff, at the phone and about to call the police, was grinning—and rubbing his knuckles.

"Once I discovered the powder tonight," she continued, "Grayson knew he had to kill us both. But a bullet was out of the question. It had to be by blows. I suppose he planned to run our car into the ravine, explain our deaths as an accident."

"Why, the guy just asked for it," said Biff. "You promised to call me if he needed a poke."

But she knew Biff. Knew his wide, wide grin stemmed from something still untold. She sat shaking her head. He had seen the cross, hadn't he? Uh-huh. . . Then how had he known it wasn't she who'd stood in the doorway?

She sat shaking her head, and Biff asked softly, "Head hurt, baby?"

She admitted that it did, a little.

"And what a head you've got!" he said. He began to chuckle. "But I was reasonably sure you wouldn't be standing on it. See, hon, what I mean? Grayson pinned the cross to his coat, all right, but upside down."

Let Your BOND AGE—To End BONDAGE!

"You can run away from life, boy. But somewhere, some time, you have to meet a guy at the end of the trail. A guy whose name is Death!"



Even as I threw the pillow, I dropped.

FLIGHT'S END

By

Robert C. Dennis

IN THAT heavy, stifling darkness someone was beating a tom-tom on my aching skull. Exerting all my strength, I managed to stir a little. Immediately the tom-tom moved away into the near distance, staying just as loud, thudding just as heavily against my brain. With another effort I came awake and then the tom-tom was someone beating on my door.

I was lying in the middle of the room. Daylight filled the cracks around the drawn shades but the room was dark. My clothes were damp and sour with perspiration. It required three attempts to get to the door.

There were two men there. They were both large and aggressive. Without a word they pushed into the room. One of them

switched on the overhead light, sending needles of pain through my eyeballs.

"What is it?" I demanded. "What do you want?"

"Want to ask some questions. I'm Henderson. Police."

I opened my eyes a little and squinted at him.

The ridges of his big face were filled with

after-shaving powder. "What's the matter with you?" he said harshly.

"I—I got drunk last night. Must have passed out."

"Where were you drinking?" He fairly snapped the words at me.

I shook my head, and wished I hadn't. "I don't remember, exactly. I think I got started in a bar called Happy's. On Hollywood Boulevard. I met somebody—another guy—we had a lot of drinks. I can't remember—why?"

Henderson ignored that. His partner prowled silently about my apartment, chewing on a toothpick. Apparently he was puzzled by the bareness of the place. I didn't enlighten him.

"Celebrating?" Henderson asked. "Or drowning your sorrow?"

His question brought back the futility. Getting drunk every night hadn't helped a bit. Last night was the biggest yet, but all I had was a bigger hangover. The empty dullness in my chest was still there, just as big, just as empty. And Diana was still with somebody else. I thought, *Knowing an apple is rotten inside never seems to keep you from wanting it.*

"How about it?" Henderson demanded. "Why did you get such a skunkful?"

"What the hell do you care?" I burst out. "If it's against the law, arrest me!"

Henderson shook his big head. He said indifferently, "You can get drunk any time you want to. . . . Where did you go when you left Happy's?"

"I don't remember."

"Who was this man you met?"

"I don't know! Just some one I ran into in the bar."

Henderson's pal came back from a visit to my bedroom, looking perplexed. Some remote obstinacy stopped me from telling him I was moving out today—all my things were in the furnished room I'd taken.

"What time did you get home?"

"I don't know!" My nerves were screaming for a drink. "I don't even know *how* I got home! What are you driving at?"

Henderson's gaze roamed over my face, as if trying to read my thoughts. "You don't remember anything you did after leaving Happy's?"

"Not anything."

He was suddenly towering over me. "Then you don't remember whether you killed Diana West last night or not? Think fast, sonny!"

I STARTED to laugh then. I guess it was hysteria, and yet in a way it was funny. Even if the joke was on me. Then the laugh soured. I said, "I didn't see Diana last night—I haven't seen her for three weeks."

"Dead," Henderson told me brutally. "Very dead. And she's not a very pretty corpse, either."

That was why it was so funny. It was her beauty that had attracted, haunted me. And dead she wasn't beautiful. And then I thought how futile all my dreams had been. She couldn't come back to me now; no matter what happened she'd never come back to me now.

Still standing over me, Henderson gave the details of her death, but I heard only snatches of it. Diana had been found in a ditch just north of Capistrano, which is perhaps sixty miles down the Coast highway toward San Diego. She'd been run over by a car. But not accidentally. Unconscious, lying there on the bare, hard pavement, a car had been driven over her—twice!

"Where's your car?" Henderson demanded, and I told him it was out in front. He jerked his head to his silent partner. "All right, Jenkins, let's take a look at it."

"Are you all finished with me?" I asked.

"Not yet," he said grimly. "You're not under arrest yet, but don't be too happy about that. And don't go anywhere."

I scarcely heard them leave. I sat there thinking of Diana and wondering why I should be grieving for her. Her soul had been as black as the ace of spades. And she couldn't be any more gone from me, dead, than she was the day she told me she was not going to marry me. There was somebody else now, she'd said.

After a time I got up and packed the last of my few belongings in a suitcase. The apartment had always been too big for me but I'd thought Diana would be moving in some day. Now I wanted to get out of there, get out as quickly as I could. I didn't stop to shave or change my clothes. I looked like a bum.

I laid out my door key to return to the landlady, but I couldn't find the little key for the mail box. I had to turn it in before I left but I didn't want to stay and look for it then. So I left my suitcase where it was and went out to get some coffee and some aspirin at the corner drug store.

Henderson's partner was in the lobby. Expressionless, chewing his toothpick, he followed me.

I knew what he score was then. Henderson would quickly eliminate all other angles and then arrest me. I shuddered a little; a defense like mine—I couldn't remember anything I did last night. What a picnic!

The effort to think of something to do almost split my head wide open and all I could think of was the man I had been drinking with last night. I remembered he was tall and very dark and, after a few drinks, he'd developed a faint accent. Somehow that had

fastened itself in my mind. But that was all.

I walked down to Hollywood Boulevard and took a street car to Happy's bar. Henderson's man was thirty feet behind me all the way.

Nobody at Happy's even remembered my being there. I went into the rest room and turned out my pockets. There were the usual half-dozen packets of matches you always pick up during the rounds of the bars. They were all familiar places, except one. That was the Blue Moon. I'd never heard of it. The address was out on the Sunset Strip. I went there.

There were three bartenders on duty. I didn't really expect anything but I asked, anyhow. None of them remembered me. Maybe they didn't. Or maybe they were just playing safe. But their indifference enraged me. Back of it of course was fear—fear of getting involved with Henderson. I shouted at the bartenders. I broke my glass, beating it on the bar.

It brought out the manager. He came out of his little office, almost running. I think he saw Jenkins, Henderson's shadow—standing in the doorway and recognized him as a cop. Jenkins looked the part. The manager said, "What do you want?"

"The man I was drinking with last night. I don't remember his name. He was tall, not very heavy, and dark. After he had a few drinks, he talked with an accent."

The manager exchanged looks with one of the bartenders. He didn't want to talk, but he was afraid of Jenkins.

"Sounds like Rossini," he said at last. "Victor Rossini."

"Do you know where he lives? It's very important that I find him."

JENKINS was using a telephone near the entrance. The door of the booth was open and he kept looking at me, and nodding his head to the phone.

"He eats lunch in the Brown Derby usually," the manager said briefly. He walked quickly away.

I started outside, running. Jenkins stepped out of the phone booth and stopped me with a big hand.

"Henderson wants you should call on him at headquarters," he said casually.

My spine iced over. Henderson had run through his investigation fast. Now he was closing the books. "Look," I said, quietly desperate, "I have to make a stop at the Brown Derby. It'll only take a minute. You'll be right there—nothing can happen. I'll call a cab."

Jenkins chewed on his tooth pick. "All right," he said indifferently.

The cab dropped us in front of the Derby—and for seconds I didn't breathe. Victor Ros-

sini was standing under the canopy that stretches out to the curb. I recognized him at once.

I rushed over and grabbed his arm. "I've been looking for you. I'm in a jam. It's about last night—"

Rossini pulled his arm loose. "My good man," he said, "I don't know what you're talking about. Who are you?"

My nerves let go on me again. I shouted at him, not making very good sense. He just stood there looking faintly bewildered.

"I met you in Happy's bar," I shouted. "We got drunk together—"

Jenkins put a hand on my arm. "All right," he said. "Let's go."

I was too sunk to hold back. I let him pull me away. Rossini said regretfully, "Sorry I can't help you, old man—if there's anything else I can do, let me know. Or better still, give me your address and I'll—"

I didn't answer. Jenkins told Rossini where my apartment was.

"I won't be there," I said wearily. "I moved a couple of days ago."

We waited on the curb for another cab. Rossini followed us, standing very close to me on the side away from Jenkins.

"If you're in trouble," he whispered in my ear, "I'll help you. Run for it, I'll get in this fellow's way."

The thought of making a break had been in the back of my mind all morning. Rossini's words were like touching a raw nerve. They shocked me into action. I didn't stop to think of their lack of logic—all at once I was running, frantically, down Vine Street toward Sunset. I had a fleeting glimpse of Rossini blundering in front of Jenkins. I was a short block away before Jenkins started his pursuit.

I reached Sunset Boulevard, swung around the corner of the N.B.C. Studios. Across the street, halfway down, I saw a cab. The traffic light was against me but I ran through it. Then I was in the cab, gasping out directions to the driver. I could hide out in my furnished room. I'd be safe there for a while, I thought. Nobody knew where it was. I hadn't even given the apartment house manager a forwarding address.

Then I went all cold again—I'd filled out change of address cards for the mailman! The police would find the room before the day was out.

I had the cabbie let me out two streets away, though it didn't really matter. I wouldn't be there any longer than it took me to get a shave and some clean clothes.

I looked like a bum when I walked in. The landlady was vacuuming the front hall, and a pretty young girl was dusting the stairway. I said, "Hello, Mrs. Banning. Is my room still unlocked?"

She gave a stiff disapproving nod at my condition. The girl smiled cheerfully at me as I went upstairs. I couldn't even manage that for her.

My suitcases and other possessions were still scattered about the room, although my clothes had been hung neatly in the closet. I wondered if Mrs. Banning had done it. More likely, the girl. There were several letters and bills on the floor where they had been slipped under the door. I sat down on the bed and held my head in my hands.

I'd have to get out of here quickly. How had I ever gotten on this marathon? It seemed I'd been running ever since Diana gave me back my modest little diamond three weeks ago. Trying to drown every memory in a lake of alcohol was certainly a form of running. So had been moving out of my apartment. Now I was truly running, and I had to keep on running. I couldn't stop. Maybe I'd never be able to stop running.

I got up wearily and changed my clothes. I had a quick shave. Then I packed a small bag. I didn't know where I'd go, but I had to get out of town.

At the door I stopped to pick up the mail from the floor. There were three or four letters; all were bills or circulars. All except one. I stared at that one stupidly. It was addressed to Miss Diana West. In care of me. The address was the old one, the apartment address, but the mailman had penciled in my new one. The postmark was Tiajuana, Mexico.

I didn't get it. It didn't make sense to me.

SOMEONE knocked softly on the door. My heart began beating against my chest till I could hardly breathe. I went to the door and eased it open a crack.

Victor Rossini pushed into my room and closed the door behind him. He held a gun in his hand, pointed very rigidly at my chest.

"Give me that letter," he whispered.

I didn't give it to him but it was not from any conscious reaction. I was simply stupefied. "Why do you want it? How did you know it was here?" Then understanding burst over me. "It was this you were after last night! That's why you got me drunk!"

"Give it to me," he repeated urgently.

"You took me home last night after I passed out, to get this letter. But you didn't get it because I'd changed my mailing address. And that's why you helped me get away today—so I'd lead you here, where the letter was."

Rossini started towards me.

"Why is it so important?" I demanded. "Is it why you killed Diana West?"

He shook his dark, handsome head. "No. Not for the letter. But I must have it."

I didn't give it to him. It didn't make any difference. I knew of the existence of the letter. I knew he was going to have to kill me, anyway.

Advancing very slowly, the gun still pointed at my chest, Rossini said once more, "Give me the letter."

I kept on retreating. *Still running, I thought. Like a sheep, always running. Run, sheep, run!*

"It won't do you any good," I told Rossini. "The detective knows you. The landlady saw you when she let you in. The cops will get you, even if you do kill me."

"I'll make it look like suicide," he said quietly. He came on, a step at a time.

Then I bumped into the corner of the bed. I shifted a little and continued my retreat. Rossini was abreast of me now, but on the other side of the narrow bed. Then we reached the wall and there was no place to go.

With his left hand, Rossini reached for a pillow, to deaden the sound of the gun.

There was no reason why I should have reacted then, unless it was the cornered-rat instinct. Unless it was because now I could no longer run away. I'd come to the end of the line. I snatched up the other pillow and flung it at him.

He had time to shoot me before I threw it but he was obsessed with the idea of deadening the report of the gun. He wasted the single instant in getting his pillow into position.

Then my pillow hit him in the face.

Even as I threw it I dropped to the floor. Rossini recovered in a flash. He fired, but by then I was rolling under the narrow bed, almost to the other side. I grabbed one of his ankles before he could leap away, jerked it up and under, so that his shin was pressed hard against the sharp edge of the bed frame.

For a moment it was a stalemate. Rossini couldn't shoot me through the thick mattress, I couldn't do any more than hold on to his foot and try to increase the leverage.

That was what did it; the edge of the bed frame cutting into his shin. He could stand the pain no longer. He tried to twist and bend over to fire under the bed. I gave a tremendous tug, pulling him off balance. He came crashing down, his head striking the corner of the bureau. For a moment he was dazed, and that moment was all I needed. I was on my feet, snatching his gun away.

Moaning a little, he sat up. I went over and hit him in the face with my fist. I hit him for Diana. But I couldn't hold my anger. I thought I would want to keep hitting him till I killed him, but then I knew that all my feelings for Diana were dead, stopped.

I wanted only to know why. So I made

Rossini tell me. There wasn't any fight left in him. . . .

H E HAD married Diana yesterday, he said, in Mexico. He shouldn't have been in Mexico because he was an alien and leaving the country even for those few hours invalidated his visa. He'd known that, but he told the immigration officers he had been born in New York City. He thought he'd be able to return without too much trouble.

But then Diana had told him. She had married him because he was wealthy, because he could give her things. She didn't want him—she wanted alimony.

Lots of it.

The alternative was deportation. She'd had pictures taken of them by a photographer to prove he'd been out of the country. She was clever about it; Diana was always clever. Before she told him, she mailed the pictures to a friend—I was the friend.

I told Rossini what he'd done.

In a rage Rossini choked her, ran the car over her, threw her body in the ditch. From her purse he'd discovered my name, got my office phone number. He trailed me to a bar and started buying me drinks till I passed out. . . .

When he finished telling me I stepped over to the door and shouted for Mrs. Banning. She came running and I told her to call Henderson at the police department.

"What is it? What's goin on?" she demanded.

"Call the police," I repeated wearily.

She called them, but she was furious. "I won't have goings-on like this in my house. I'll refund your money and you can get out right now."

I didn't argue with her, though I didn't know where I could go. The housing shortage was acute in Hollywood. The only way I'd managed this room was to trade my apartment for it. Maybe I'd have to leave town yet.

The thought had me quaking.

And then in my ears I heard a voice say, "Go on. Run some more. Run, sheep, run!"

All at once I was shouting at her: "I'll stay here as long as I want to! I'll stay till I'm ready to go. You or no one else will put me out."

I took a deep breath.

Mrs. Banning backed out of the room. Her eyes were wide. I heard her running down the stairs as if I might pursue her. Then the pretty-faced girl popped into sight from up the hall. She was laughing and trying to control herself.

I watched her, waiting.

"That's the only way to handle mother. Shout her down. Poor dad was married to her for thirty years and she had him on the run all that time."

She had me then.

Then I was laughing with her, standing there, guarding Rossini for Henderson. It was the first time in weeks I'd laughed. But I was thinking too. *I'll never run again, I thought. No matter what, I'll never run again.*



SPIN A WEB OF MURDER

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STRANGE TRAILS

The CASE of the MILLION ... MURDERERS



KUMAR NATH PANDE, WEALTHY HIGH-CASTE HINDU, DIED IN 1930, LEAVING A LARGE INCOME FROM PROPERTY NEAR PAKAUR, INDIA, TO HIS SONS BENOYENDRA, KNOWN FAMILIARLY AS BENOY, 26, AND AMARENDRA OR AMAR, 16.

IN ADMINISTERING THE ESTATE BENOY, A DISSOLUTE SPENDTHRIFT, PROVED SO NIGGARDLY WITH AMAR THAT THE BOY THREATENED TO SUE FOR HIS SHARE.

ON OCT. 23, 1932, BENOY VISITED THE HOME OF THEIR AUNT, RANJ SURJABATI, TO TALK THINGS OVER. THE NEXT DAY AMAR FELL ILL. THE FAMILY PHYSICIAN DIAGNOSED THE CASE AS LOCKJAW, AND ADMINISTERED ANTI-TETANUS SERUM.

BENOY RETURNED WITH HIS FRIEND DR. TARANATH BATTACHARYA, WHO PRESCRIBED MEDICINE WHICH THE AUNT, SUSPICIOUS, SECRETLY DESTROYED.



ON NOV. 26, 1933, AS RANJ SURJABATI, AMAR AND BENOY PASSED THROUGH THE CROWDED CALCUTTA RAILROAD STATION AMAR CRIED OUT IN PAIN.



ON THE TRAIN HE EXPLAINED HE'D FELT A SHARP PRICK IN HIS ARM AS A SHORT, DARK, SHABBY MAN SHOULDERED BY. EXAMINATION REVEALED AN ANGRY RED MARK AND A SMALL YELLOW STAIN ON HIS SHIRT SLEEVE.

AMAR DIED ON DECEMBER 4TH, DESPITE THE BEST OF MEDICAL ATTENTION.

WHEN A BLOOD EXAMINATION SHOWED MILLIONS OF BUBONIC PLAGUE GERMS, THE FIRST CASE IN MONTHS, THE INDIAN POLICE WERE CALLED IN.

... to MURDER

by LEE

DETECTIVES, PROHIBITED FROM GRILLING A HIGH-CASTE HINDU, NEVERTHELESS LEARNED DR. BATTACHARYA, PROFESSEDLY WORKING ON A CURE FOR PLAGUE HAD, EARLY IN 1932, REPEATEDLY SOUGHT A BUBONIC CULTURE FROM THE CALCUTTA INSTITUTE. REFUSED, HE ACCEPTED A TETANUS CULTURE INSTEAD.

DURING BENOY'S VISIT TO AMAR SHORTLY AFTERWARD, THE AUNT STATED BENOY HAD PRODUCED A PAIR OF DARK GLASSES AND PRESSED THEM DOWN SO HARD ON AMAR'S NOSE THAT BLOOD FLOWED. THE TETANUS ATTACK FOLLOWED.

ON JULY 11, 1933, HAVING SECURED PERMISSION TO EXPERIMENT AT THE HAFKINE INSTITUTE AT BOMBAY, BENOY AND DR. BATTACHARYA PROCURED TWO WHITE RATS AND INOCULATED THEM WITH PLAGUE

WHEN THEY DIED, THE DEADLY GERMS WERE SMUGGLED OUT, DETECTIVES CONCLUDED, AND GIVEN THE "SHORT DARK, SHABBY MAN" TO INJECT INTO AMAR.

BENOY AND DR. BATTACHARYA WERE CONVICTED AND SENTENCED TO DEATH FOR ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST STUPIDLY INGENUOUS MURDER PLOTS. ON JAN. 10, 1936, THE SENTENCE WAS COMMUTED TO LIFE IMPRISONMENT.

42



The long trail was ended at last. . . .

MURDER CASTLE

By
**Joseph Fulling
Fishman**

PHILADELPHIA was broiling under a scorching sun when Eugene Smith approached, for the second time within ten days, the little shop at 1316 Callowhill Street which bore the sign:

B. F. PERRY
PATENTS BOUGHT AND SOLD

The moment he entered to show Mr. Perry the changes in his ingenious saw handle, which Perry had suggested ten days before, Smith was struck by the nebulous atmosphere of something strange and sinister which seemed to hover about the place.

There was no one in, at least not on the lower floor. Smith walked over to the counter. On it lay a paperweight, a blotter, several pens, a bottle of ink, a tube of glue, and a sheet of paper with the drawings which the inventor had made on his first visit, to show various features of his model—all blanketed with dust, and all in exactly the same position as he had left them, more than a week before!

There was something eerie about it; Smith couldn't tell what. A sudden feeling came over him that he was being watched. Almost before he was aware of it he was at the door, his hand on the latch. Then, deciding that it was all imagination, he went to the rear and called up the stairs leading to the second floor.

"Mr. Perry!"

When they caught up at last with the meek little master of Chicago's ghastly "Murder Castle," all he had to say was, "I was born with the devil in me. I reveled in the thought and act of destroying life. . . ." and thus explained a saga of horror unequaled in the modern annals of crime!

Silence followed, interrupted only by the buzzing of a large bottleneck fly beating its body against the store window. Smith shouted again.

Once more the fly's efforts to reach the outside made the only sound which came to the inventor's ears. Still strangely uneasy and upset, but unwilling to admit to himself that he was afraid, Smith slowly ascended to the single chamber on the second floor.

He never would have taken the first step upward, had the slightest suspicion crossed his mind that in that room lay the first link in a chain of crime so monstrous and maleficent, so utterly depraved and satanic, that the name of the man who forged it was to become an American household symbol for the very essence of evil.

The window was open, but the shutters on it were bowed, which made the room so dusk-like it was impossible for Smith to distinguish objects clearly. Before his eyes became used to the murk, he took a few steps forward. He stumbled over something lying on the floor. Involuntarily he put out his hands. They fell on something soft and cold, something which felt like a piece of meat just out of the icebox.

With an exclamation of terror the inventor scrambled to his feet. In the dim light he stared at the thing which had tripped him.

It was the body of a dead man!

Smith's first impulse was to flee. Then he changed his mind. He flung the shutters open, and turned and stared at the thing of horror lying there on the floor.

It had a macabre appearance, the face disfigured by decomposition, and part of it blackened, as though by burning. At the side of the body were fragments of a bottle, a filled pipe and a burned match. There was a slight, sweetish odor about the room, which the startled discoverer recognized as chloroform. It appeared as if the dead man had started to light his pipe and that the chloroform had exploded.

Smith had had more than enough. He turned and raced down the steps, three at a jump. A half hour later the place was swarming with police and detectives.

The officers agreed with Smith concerning the accidental nature of the man's death. They held the body in the morgue for a few days and then, no one claiming it, had it buried in Potters Field.

SCARCELY had it been interred when Jephth D. Howe, a St. Louis attorney, wrote the coroner and the Fidelity Mutual Life Association that he represented Mrs. Carrie Pietzel, whose husband had been living in Philadelphia under the name of Perry, and that he was anxious to ascertain if this particular Perry was in fact Pietzel.

The records of the Fidelity Company showed that Pietzel had been insured for \$10,000 on November 9, 1893. It was now September, 1894, less than a year. This, coupled with the rather suspicious circumstance of Pietzel's changing his name, led the insurance company to assign an investigator named Harvey Cass to try to ascertain if any attempt at swindling were involved.

When Cass called on Mrs. Pietzel in St. Louis, all she could tell him was that she hadn't heard from her husband for several weeks—which she hadn't thought unusual, because he wasn't much of a writer—and that the first she had known of the death of a man named Perry was when a friend of her husband, a Mr. H. H. Holmes, who lived in Wilmette, a suburb of Chicago, had told her about having read a piece in the paper concerning it.

The agent found out equally little from Mrs. Holmes. She said her husband wasn't at home, as his business kept him on the road a good part of the time; but that, when she again heard from him, she would tell him to get in touch with the Fidelity Company. A few days later Holmes communicated with the Fidelity and made an appointment to meet with Mr. Fouze, its president on September 20th.

The latter looked up, following his secretary's announcement of the visitor, to see a rather short, commonplace-looking man with heavy brown hair, a large brown mustache and soft, cow-like eyes.

"You knew Pietzel well?" Fouze enquired.

"Yes, very."

"Good. Mr. Howe will be here in a few minutes."

"Mr. Howe?"

"Oh, I thought you knew him. He's an attorney in the case. Represents Mrs. Pietzel. He didn't know Pietzel but you can make the identification—or otherwise."

"I'll do what I can," the visitor promised. "I took the liberty of bringing along with me Alice Pietzel, Mrs. Pietzel's fifteen-year-old daughter. She's in the outer office. If it is her father she can help identify him, although I dislike subjecting her to such an ordeal."

Two days later, after the body had been disinterred and put in the death house at Potters Field, a party consisting of the deputy coroner, the coroner's physician, an inspector of the Philadelphia Police, Mr. Howe, Eugene Smith, Mr. Fouze, Holmes and young Alice Pietzel went out to see if an identification could be made. Before they went into where it lay, Fouze asked Holmes to again mention the distinguishing marks on Pietzel's body.

"Well," the mild-mannered little man repeated, "he had a wart on the back of his neck. I know this because he showed it to me once and talked about having it removed. Then he had a scar from a cut on his left leg and a

bruised and discolored thumbnail which he said had been crushed in a train window. Alice tells me also that he had a peculiar separation of his front teeth, but I never noticed that particularly."

All with the exception of Alice then went into the room where the body lay. The coroner's physician, after a rather hasty examination, announced that he couldn't find any such marks.

"Let me look," Holmes suggested. "I've studied medicine."

He stepped up to the table, removed his coat, rolled up his sleeves, and, under the fascinated gaze of the others, cut away the clothes from the neck of the corpse. Then, with an expert gesture, expected only of a skilled surgeon, he made an incision and removed the wart, now plainly visible.

Following this, he traced with a knife a two-inch-long scar on the left leg and, with a skillful twist of his wrist, amputated the right thumbnail and showed its corrugated discoloration.

Then the body was covered, with the exception of the mouth and Alice Pietzel, quivering with fright, was brought in. She shrank back as she saw the covered object on the table. But, gently encouraged by Holmes and the others, she stepped up and peered closely at the mouth.

"It's him," she whispered, beginning to weep. "I remember the gold tooth and the little space between the two front ones." Crying broken-heartedly, she was led out of the room.

The Fidelity Company was satisfied that Perry was in reality Pietzel. Before he left to return to St. Louis, Mr. Howe was handed a check for \$9,715.85, the balance having been deducted to cover expenses. The case was apparently closed.

Holmes, after being thanked by Mr. Fouze, also departed. He refused any compensation, saying that he had only done his duty to a friend.

"Nice fellow," Fouze commented to his secretary after Holmes had gone.

"Yes, very pleasant," the secretary agreed.

THEY both had many occasions afterwards to remember these few words. Destiny was to have the paths of Fouze and the "nice fellow" cross again, and before many days had passed. The first precursor of their next meeting was the receipt of an astonishing letter by Mr. Fouze from a prisoner in the St. Louis City Jail, Marion C. Hedgepeth, who was awaiting sentence for train robbery, and of whom Fouze had never heard.

In July, 1894, I was in jail in St. Louis on a winding charge. In jail with me was a man

named H. M. Howard, who was held for some kind of a drug store swindle.

Howard confided to me he was going to spring an insurance fraud by substituting a corpse. He asked me to recommend a lawyer for this business and said that if the deal went through he would give me \$500.00. I recommended a lawyer in St. Louis by the name of Howe. I asked Howard how he was going to work this insurance fraud, and he told me that, being a druggist, he could easily fix the thing by making Pietzel look like he was mortally wounded, and then substituting a corpse.

I believe Pietzel is alive and well. But whether he is or not, I am sure that that body in Philadelphia was not his. It is probably unnecessary for me to add that I never received the \$500.00 that Howard promised me. That is the reason that I am writing you this letter.

W. E. Gary, an agent of the Fidelity Company, sent to St. Louis to cross-question Hedgepeth, reported to Mr. Fouze that he believed the prisoner was telling the truth. The president thereupon detailed Gary and two other men to search for Holmes, or "Howard." For several weeks they scoured the Midwest, while keeping a watch on the wanted man's wife. They had no luck. Learning that Holmes had been born in Gilmanton, New Hampshire, Gary and his men decided to go there and start their search all over again.

By one of those strange coincidences which sometimes made detectives wonder if the finger of fate is not attached to a supernatural hand, they learned that Holmes was visiting in Gilmanton, the first time he had been back there in more than twenty-five years.

"We won't collar him right away," Gary told his associates. "We'll see what we can find out about him by tailing him and digging into his past."

It didn't take them long to learn that Holmes, or Howard, had been born under the name of Henry Webster Mudgett and that he had left Gilmanton at a comparatively early age. He was living with a woman who, it was afterwards ascertained, had gone through a marriage ceremony with him and actually believed she was his second wife, not knowing that he had not been divorced. He went to Boston with her, the detectives following him. Owing to the difficulty of trailing him in a big city, Gary decided to arrest him.

He and his men stepped up to him on the street one day.

"We're officers," Gary explained. "You're under arrest, Holmes."

He watched closely for any guilty reaction. There was none. The man turned calmly, looked the officers up and down with a semi-insolent stare.

"My name isn't Holmes. It's Howard.

Hereafter be kind enough to know what you're doing before you accost innocent people."

"If you're innocent you can prove it," Gary answered, not at all bluffed by the other's manner. "You're charged with defrauding the Fidelity Mutual Life Association."

"Ridiculous!" the prisoner ejaculated.

But, when questioned at the police station, there was a surprising change in Holmes' attitude; a change, in fact, so astonishing that it bewildered the officers and made them feel that there was far more depth to this mild-mannered, bovine-eyed man than appeared on the surface, and that behind his affable, anxious-to-please exterior lay some mystery which he was hoping this attitude would conceal.

For, beginning with the very first question: "Your identification of that body found on Callowhill Avenue was false, wasn't it?" Holmes, to the astonishment of the three detectives, promptly answered, "Yes, it was."

"It wasn't, in fact, the body of Pietzel?"

"No, sir."

"Pietzel is alive, isn't he?"

"Yes."

"Have you seen him since you made your identification?"

"Yes, twice, once in Detroit and once in Quincy, Illinois."

"Where is he now?"

"I don't know. He told me he was going to South America, but he didn't tell me what place. I don't know whether he went or not."

"How did the little girl Alice come to make the identification?"

"I coached her. I told her that her father had the kind of teeth which the corpse had; kept repeating it to her until she believed it."

"Whose corpse was it?"

"I don't know. A medical friend in New York got it for me. I put the body in a trunk, shipped it to Philadelphia, sent the check to Pietzel, and told him to claim the trunk and take the body to the little place he had on Callowhill Avenue, which he ran under the name of Perry. I then arranged everything, the chloroform, bottle and pipe, and so on, to make it look as though the death had come from an explosion."

I NTERESTED spectators of the quizzing of Holmes had been Detective O. M. Hanscom, of the Boston police department, and John Cornish, superintendent of the Pinkerton Detective Agency, which had been called in by the Fidelity Company to assist in the investigation. Hanscom now took a hand in the questioning.

"Where's Mrs. Pietzel at the present time?" he queried.

"At Burlington, Vermont."

"You have a lot of influence over her?"

Holmes gave a self-satisfied smirk. Hanscom could see that he had a good share of the vanity possessed by most criminals.

"I tell you what I want you to do," he continued persuasively. "I want you to write a letter to her and ask her to come here. Don't tell her you're under arrest."

"Sure," Holmes replied affably. "Give me a pen and paper."

That night the missive was sent. Two days later Mrs. Pietzel came to Boston. She seemed stunned when she learned that Holmes was in custody, and indicated she would be glad to help in any way she could.

But she proved to be either unbelievably naive—if not downright stupid—or extraordinarily artful. The information which she gave merely accentuated the officers' already-held view that there was some sinister mystery connected with Holmes, the solution of which appeared to become a more and more remote possibility the deeper they sought to dig into it.

For Mrs. Pietzel asserted that she had complete confidence in Holmes and believed implicitly everything he said.

"Did he tell you where your husband is now?" Gary demanded.

"Well, not recently. But he told me several times where he was, only I missed him."

"What do you mean, you missed him?"

"I mean Mr. Holmes wrote me from Chicago and Detroit and Toronto and Ogdensburg, New York, that my husband was with him, and asked me to come and see him—my husband I mean—and I went to all those places, but each time something had happened which had made it necessary for Mr. Pietzel to leave before I got there."

"How did you find that out?"

"Mr. Holmes told me so on my arrival," she said simply.

"Didn't it strike you as queer that your husband didn't write to you himself instead of through someone else?" Gary questioned.

"Why, no, not particularly. I assumed he just asked Mr. Holmes to do it."

It was an incredible story. The officers completely stumped, studied the woman's face for some hint of what was really going on in her mind. It told them nothing.

"Well, what do you believe about your husband now?" Cornish demanded. "Do you think he's alive or dead?"

"I think he's alive."

"Why?"

"Because Mr. Holmes says he is."

"But Holmes and your daughter Alice identified the body. You know that, don't you?"

"Yes, but Mr. Holmes told me afterward that he thought they were both mistaken."

"Where's Alice now?"

"In London, England," came the flabbergasting reply.

"London!" Gary ejaculated. "By herself?"

"No, the other two children are with her."

"The other two! Didn't you bring two from Vermont with you?"

"Yes, Dessie and the baby. But I have three more. There's Alice; she's 15. Then there's Nellie, 11; and Howard, 9."

"Well, you certainly didn't let three young children go to England alone, did you?"

"No, of course not. Miss Williams traveled with them and she's with them now."

"And who is Miss Williams?"

"She's a former secretary of Mr. Holmes."

Again the eyes of the officers met. There it was again! Everything this woman said and did seemed to lead back to this undistinguished-looking, mild-mannered little man. It was all becoming more complicated by the minute.

"Did Holmes suggest their going to London?" Gary queried.

"Why, yes, of course," Mrs. Pietzel replied, as though it were ridiculous that one should think anything else.

When further questioning yielded nothing additional Gary went over to the jail to see Holmes concerning the extraordinary story the woman had told about the children.

"Yes, that's right," the prisoner admitted. "I thought it would add to their education for them to travel in a foreign land at a time when their minds are still malleable."

"What is their address in London?" Gary asked.

"I don't know the exact number. But it's on Vadar Street."

That night the detective sent a cable to Scotland Yard. Within six hours he had a reply:

NO VADAR STREET OR ANYTHING
RESEMBLING IT IN LONDON OR
VICINITY.

Gary, whose work would end with Holmes' trial, turned this cable and such other information as he had over to Mr. George S. Graham, District Attorney of Philadelphia. The latter, convinced that only the surface of Holmes' criminal activities had been scratched, assigned Detective Frank P. Geyer, attached to his office, to dig further into the matter immediately following the trial.

On June 3, 1895, Holmes and Howe pleaded guilty at Philadelphia to the charge of defrauding an insurance company and were sentenced to two years in the penitentiary, the maximum which, at that time, could be given under the law.

GGEYER, confident that the "something" which Holmes was concealing had to do with the three Pietzel children, had in the meantime obtained from their

mother a list of the places from which Holmes had written her, whether the letters related to her husband or not. Immediately after Holmes had been sentenced Geyer started out on what was to prove to be one of the most extraordinary pieces of detective work ever undertaken in this country.

He had with him samples of Holmes' handwriting, together with photographs of him and the three children, Alice, Nellie and Howard, which he had obtained from their mother.

He went first to Cincinnati, one of the places from which Mrs. Pietzel had heard from the swindler. Here he spent almost three weeks visiting every hotel in the city, even the small "flea bags" near the railroad stations, and went over every signature on their registers for the six months prior to Holmes' arrest. At almost the last one, the Bristol House, a small, but clean and well-kept hostelry, the register showed, on September 28th, the following:

"Alex E. Cooke and three children."

Geyer's hand shook as he compared the signature with the sample of Holmes' handwriting which he had brought with him. It didn't require a graphologist to show that they were the same.

That fact was clinched when the clerk recognized the four photographs. "I remember them well," he said. "They only stayed here one night. He said he was going to rent a house here."

That was enough for Geyer. He now began an even more weary and tedious search than that of the hotels had been. This time it was of all real estate and rental offices. After more than two weeks of ceaseless tramping in and out of such places, Geyer's heart gave an exultant leap when a lawyer who dealt in real estate, J. C. Thomas, recognized Holmes' picture as that of a man to whom he had rented a house on September 28th at 305 Poplar Street.

"He paid for a month in advance," Mr. Thomas reported, "but he only stayed two days. I don't know why."

Geyer sped to the Poplar Street address. The house was unoccupied. But Miss Hill, a neighbor, identified Holmes' photograph.

"I saw this man and a boy of about nine or ten drive up on the twenty-ninth in a furniture wagon," she informed the detective. "They unloaded a big iron stove. I didn't notice if they had any other furniture. The next day the man rang my bell, told me he had decided not to stay, and said I could take the stove if I wanted it."

"Did you take it?"

"Yes, it's in my cellar."

Geyer looked over the vacant house, paying particular attention to the cellar and yard. When he saw the stove his astonishment—and

suspicion—grew. It was of a huge size, an old-fashioned wood burner of the kind only used in rural districts. Its large "belly" was entirely devoid of ashes. Nor did it smell of smoke. Obviously, it had not been used, at least recently.

But why did Holmes want such a stove at all? Obviously it wasn't required for warmth, as the house was steam heated. It must have been for a different purpose. It was but another of the fragments of curious circumstances concerning Holmes which were beginning to crystallize in Geyer's mind the feeling that the affability of this suave little swindler and chronic liar was but a thin veneer covering a savage and ruthless monster.

For the next four months, without one minute's let-up, Geyer, at Indianapolis, Chicago and Detroit, tramped from one hotel and from one real estate office to another. In all of them he found that Holmes had stopped at a hotel, usually a very small one, with one or more of the three children. Often he changed hotels three or four times in a single city and within the space of a few days. Sometimes he kept the boy at one place and the two girls at another. Occasionally he would keep the boy and the older girl together and register the third child at a second hostelry. At another time he would be at the same place with one, or with two, or with all of them. Once, in Indianapolis, he had each child in a separate rooming house, while he himself registered at still another, so that he actually used four places, all of them within two blocks of each other!

To Geyer it was not only bewildering; it was maddeningly irritating. What these curious manoeuvres were all about he couldn't imagine. They did, however, testify to the deviousness of Holmes' mind. But this didn't help Geyer much. He already had plenty of evidence to prove that.

Wearied both physically and mentally, but more determined than ever to solve the Holmes riddle, he finally reached Toronto. Here, as in Cincinnati, Geyer found that Holmes, after keeping the children at several different hotels for a day or two, had rented a house from a Mrs. Nudel. On this, too, he had paid a month's rent in advance, but had only remained for a day or two. Once more a neighbor, John Ryves, was of assistance.

"That's the man," he said, when shown Holmes' picture. "I had a particularly good chance to get a look at him."

"What do you mean?"

"He came over and borrowed my spade."

"Your spade!"

"Why, yes," Ryves responded, apparently surprised at the intensity in the detective's voice. "Nothing unusual about that, is there? Neighbors around here are always borrowing things."

Geyer ignored the question. "Could you lend me that spade?" he asked.

"Why, yes, certainly."

A few minutes later he and Detective Cuddy, designated to assist him by the Toronto Chief of Police were going over every inch of the cellar of the house Holmes had occupied for so short a time. Geyer, moving along inch by inch tapping the floor with his foot, suddenly stopped.

"Here's a soft spot!" he ejaculated, pointing to a four-foot-square space which showed every evidence of having been recently disturbed. "Let's start digging."

Together the two men worked, their shadows grotesque and eerie on the cellar wall. The spade had turned over but a few clods of damp earth when a nauseating stench struck their nostrils, a noisome smell of putrid decay which made them recoil as though with a blow.

"It's awful!" Cuddy exclaimed. "I can't stand it."

But the more resolute Geyer struck to the job. "Just a moment or two," he urged. . . .

His words subsided into a mumble as the spade struck something which had a different "feel" from the soft earth. Reeling, and revolted by the terrible odor, Geyer forced himself to reach down into the hole to grasp whatever it was the spade had hit. His fingers closed on it. He pulled it to the surface.

It was a human forearm bone!

Revulsion and nausea pulled at the stomachs of both men. They hurried to the yard to get a breath of fresh air. Sick though he felt at the horror of it all, Geyer experienced that elation which every detective feels when he discerns, even though it may still be distant, the end of a long and tedious trail.

With Cuddy, after the air had somewhat revived him, he went back into the dank chamber of death. He dug carefully now, around the edges of the softer earth, pausing now and then to return to the yard for a respite. But the job was finished at last.

There before them were the two little girls; Alice lying on her side, and Nellie, her long black hair neatly braided, on her face. Both bodies were terribly decomposed, but were identifiable.

The few days which followed were even more trying for Geyer. For it was then that Mrs. Pietzel, prostrated with grief, identified the two children.

The two children were buried in St. James Cemetery in Toronto. It was the verdict of the coroner's jury that they had been murdered by Holmes.

IMMEDIATELY after the funeral Geyer returned to Detroit to continue his search for Howard. He had no doubt that he would find that he also had been murdered.

"That'll make three," he commented to Cuddy. "That's about enough for one man. After all, he can't murder them by the dozen."

He was wrong, for the first time since he had undertaken the case. For, as the future showed, he had but scratched the surface. Sophisticated and experienced though he was, and thoroughly accustomed to brutality in all its forms, it would have been difficult even for him to have conceived the kind of a human fiend which subsequent investigation proved Holmes to be.

After again combing Detroit without finding a clue other than those which had previously come to light, Geyer returned to Indianapolis. Then he decided to comb the little junction towns on the railroad between Chicago and Indianapolis. The same dreary routine which he had followed in the larger cities was pursued by him in Logansport, Peru, Montpelier Junction, Adrian and a dozen other places; but without success.

Back to Indianapolis he went, this time to try the suburbs surrounding that city. He came to the pretty little town of Irvington. A Dr. Thompson identified the picture of Holmes.

"I rented a house to him," the physician declared. "He only stayed a few days. Curious kind of fellow. Although the house was amply heated, he brought with him—"

"A large wood-burning stove?" Geyer finished.

"Why, yes. How did you know?"

"I'll tell you later," Geyer promised. "Just show me that stove."

The doctor took him down to the cellar of the house. Geyer examined the outside of the stove carefully. He tried to keep from showing the excitement which he felt when he noticed stains on the door which had every appearance of dried blood. The inside was full of fine ashes. In a corner of the cellar was an old fly screen. While Dr. Thompson watched curiously, the detective began sifting the ashes through the fine wire mesh. When he finished the doctor's curiosity was considerably more than satisfied.

For, resting on the screen, were almost a complete set of human teeth and a piece of jawbone, which the physician said was obviously that of a child.

Geyer's search for the Pietzel children was at an end. The purpose for which Holmes had used the stove, and which the officer had begun to suspect before he had been on the case a week, was established at last.

That the few remains were really those of the young boy Howard was proven conclusively the following day. When the story appeared in the papers, a nearby merchant called on Geyer and handed him a small coat.

"A man came into my store and asked if I

would keep this for a day or so," he asserted. "He never came back."

The detective showed him the photograph of Holmes. He promptly identified it as that of the man who had left the coat. The grief-stricken mother recognized it as the garment of her son Howard.

Geyer hurried to Philadelphia to talk to Holmes again. He wasted no time in verbal fencing.

"I've found the bodies of Alice, Nellie and Howard Pietzel," he announced. "You killed them, just as you killed their father."

Holmes looked at him calmly. "I didn't kill Pietzel," he asserted, without the quiver of a muscle.

"You're lying," Geyer came back bluntly, "just as you lied about the children being in London with Miss Williams."

A sudden thought struck him. He took a shot in the dark. "Miss Williams couldn't go to London," he went on, raising his voice a trifle, "because dead people can't travel. *You killed her too!*"

The last sentence burst out in an accusing shout. Its effect was astounding. For the first time Holmes showed concern and emotion.

"I didn't kill her," he screamed. "I tell you I didn't! It was her sister Nettie and not Minnie who was killed. I was there and I saw it. She was jealous of her sister, jealous over me. One night before I could stop her she picked up a stool and hit Nettie. I helped Minnie dump Nettie's body into the lake. But that was after she was dead. That was the reason Minnie went to London. She wanted to get out of the country. She's in London now, but I don't know where."

It took Geyer a moment to grasp the significance of the unexpected outburst. He stared at Holmes with a look of wonder.

"Where did this happen?" he asked.

"At my house in Chicago."

The detective nodded. Without another word he arose and went to see District Attorney Graham. That night a long message went to Chief of Police Hadenoch at Chicago.

THE house which, the chief found from the tax records, belonged to Holmes, was a three story brick structure at the corner of Sixty-third and Wallace Streets. There was little to distinguish it from hundreds of other houses in the Windy City. When Hadenoch and his men entered it they found that the second floor was a furnished apartment which, they ascertained later, Holmes had occupied when in Chicago. The first floor was occupied by stores, while the entire third story was used as a laboratory. It contained the usual miscellany of test tubes, rubber hose, glass containers and tables covered with stains which seem to be a part of every labora-

tory, no matter for what purpose it is used.

Hadenoch and his subordinates searched the two upper floors systematically. The apartment contained nothing but comfortable, though inexpensive, furniture and furnishings. In the bureau drawers was the usual wearing apparel, all of it a man's.

"Can't see anything here to get excited about," the Chief grumbled. "I wonder why they sent that—"

One of his men, coming out of the bathroom, checked the words. "Look here a minute, chief," he urged excitedly.

He pointed to the floor. In the center of the room, under a rug which the detective had pulled up, was a trap door with an iron handle, fitted into a cup in the wood so that it could not be felt when anyone walked over the rug!

While the other officers leaned over breathlessly, the chief grasped the metal ring and pulled the trap open. The light from the bathroom, penetrating for several feet, disclosed a circular iron stairway. There was no telling what lay below, and Hadenoch did not intend to take any chances.

"Go down to the wagon and get a lantern," he ordered one of his men.

The latter returned in a few moments. "Get your guns out," the chief directed. "It all looks like something in a cheap melodrama, but we'd better be on our guard."

Slowly he descended, followed by his men. There was no landing at what they judged would be the first floor, the stairs winding on down through the darkness, their metal gleams reflecting back into their eyes from the wavering rays of the lamp. As they reached the end they came to a large, dirt-floored cellar, which gave off a dank, earthy odor.

Slowly they went around, all of them thinking of horror and mystery stories they had read, in which unexpected trap doors and disappearing people figured, and all stepping warily. The first thing caught up in the lantern's rays was a large wooden table on the far side of the room. Then, to their astonishment, there came into view another circular stairway. The chief directed two of his men to follow its windings.

They returned in a few moments to report that it led directly to the third floor laboratory, where there was another trapdoor under the linoleum!

In the meantime Hadenoch and his men had discovered something else of interest. It was a large iron stove, exactly similar to those which had first aroused in Geyer's mind the suspicion that this pleasant little man, whose devious trail he was following, was in reality one of the world's most extraordinary criminals.

The next few hours were a macabre night-

mare to Chief Hadenoch and his men. Digging into the damp earth of the cellar, they came upon the skeleton of a woman. Then, in quick succession, they brought to light a grisly array of human ribs, vertebrae, hip bones, skulls and many other parts of human trunks so decomposed that it was impossible to tell to which part of the body they belonged.

Further search and sifting of a big pile of ashes in the stove revealed bits of clothing, small pieces of jewelry, blackened rings, human teeth and parts of bones. Some of these trinkets were later identified as having belonged to Minnie and Nettie Williams.

When the news of the discoveries in the "Murder Castle" of "Bluebeard Holmes", as the press referred to it, flashed over a shocked country, Geyer, in Philadelphia, decided that now, if ever, was the time to obtain the full story from Holmes himself. He had "pegged" the wholesale killer as being extraordinarily vain, and he decided to play on this trait. He went to the Moyamensing Prison to see him.

"You're a genius," he said admiringly. "It was extraordinary the way you were able to keep all these people in the same city; your wife, Mrs. Pietzel, and the three children, all within a few blocks of each other and not one knowing the other was there."

"It wasn't bad, was it?" Holmes smirked.

"Bad! I should say it wasn't! I'll bet there isn't one man in a million who could have done it. The whole country's wondering about it. If some of those smart detectives knew how many people you'd really killed, it would knock them off their perch. I tell you what," he went on, as if he'd had a sudden inspiration, "why don't you tell your story to the papers? There's never been a sensation in America like that would be."

"It would make them sit up and take notice," Holmes admitted.

"You bet it would! Say, how many people have you killed?"

The reply was so stunning that Geyer, immune to surprise as he thought he was, could only stare incredulously.

"Twenty-seven," Holmes said.

Geyer finally found his voice. "Quit your fooling," he grinned. "I mean, really how many."

"Twenty-seven, I tell you. You don't have to believe it if you don't want to, but I can give you their names. I tell you what I'll do. I'll give the story, with names and dates and everything, to the papers."

He kept his promise. The statement which he handed the press is perhaps the most extraordinary confession ever obtained from a criminal either in this or any other country. In it he listed the names of twenty-seven people, men, women and children—including

(Continued on page 90)

IF LOOKS COULD KILL

By Seymour Irving Richin



She tore free of the clinging spot. . . .

It was a grim farewell party the police gave for pretty little Jacqueline—when they showed her a mirror which distorted her stage-struck loveliness into a hideous caricature of a murderess!

HANDS were hurting her, jarring her shoulders. Strange hands had taken a sinking grip there. They wouldn't let go. They'd never let go. The digging, shaking fingers made her head toss again and again. The grip gave her no rest, peace. She could only close her eyes, sob against the grinding bite of the hands.

"Nice looker, eh, Joe?" A harsh voice

grated in the darkness beyond her wet, joined lashes. She didn't understand what was happening. She didn't know where she was or why. That voice, she'd never heard that voice before.

"Yeah. A nice looker, Clint," said another voice flatly.

She tried to think, remember. There had been a party, a wild one; she knew that much. Faces spun in her mind. Smiling, beaming faces. The faces were blurry, a mixture of fines and shadow, like a negative. Her mind's eye couldn't focus through the mist in her head. . . .

But she felt the pain. Stabbingly. The ache in her shoulders throbbed like a heartbeat under the punishing hands. Her chin was caught in two rough fingers, snapped upward.

"Nice looker, sure. But looks can kill, eh Joe?" Clint's voice, the harsh voice in front of her, the voice of the grinding fingers, was heavy with contempt. "She must have been Zaggert's pet, but he fooled one girl too many. Still, she don't look the killer kind, does she, Joe?"

"Not the killer kind," the flat monotone agreed.

The words swarmed against her mind like rain on a window. The words jumbled and blurred like raindrops twisting around. Alarm roused her dimly. There was some mistake.

Killer kind.

It—it isn't true, she thought, *I'm not a killer.*

It wasn't in her heart to kill, to hurt anybody. She was plain, gentle Jacqueline whom everyone had loved back in her home town—Jackie Ross, a twenty-year-old actress with stars in her eyes, a hopeful who had thought New York would be her stage.

"They fool you, these pretty ones." The gravel-voiced man called Clint enjoyed a laugh. "They look like they can't do anything but kiss. Know something, Joe?" The voice became confidential. "This is the book they tell you to watch out for. This is the book you can't tell by the cover—a killer's face. Hah, that's a good one, Joe."

"Yeah. That's a good one, Clint." The flat voice whittled at her nerves like a knife on a stick. Joe was good with that knife. He used it some more. His voice came at her then.

"You killed a man, Jackie. Killed him right in this theatre. Sure, he needed a knife in him. More girls than a marquee has lights, that's what they said about Big Ed Zaggert. Sure, he had it coming. Why not talk and get it off your mind, Jackie?"

TALK it off her mind? Talk what? Oh, if she could only think—her head ached so unbearably. Where had she been all day? How had she gotten here? Piece by

piece, remembrance came seeping through the mist in her mind. She had been going home at last. That was right, wasn't it? Yes, it was, it was! But there had been something else. Something just before going to the bus.

She said her farewells, had packed her bags, had even bought the bus ticket home, and—oh! A party. That was it. It was coming back now, clearly. They had asked her in. They had wished her luck. The people at the party had even toasted her. There had been many such toasts. They wouldn't let her refuse. She'd gotten dizzy; it was all so new to her, the drinking. Then she'd left the whirl of faces for the bus.

But she hadn't gone alone. No. Not alone.

Somebody had been with her. Somebody she knew but couldn't remember. The drinking had blurred her mind. Her escort had been a featureless, nameless form to lean on. That was all—just anybody. . . .

So Zaggert was dead. Her head ached. She'd hated Zaggert. He'd promised her the world in a teacup. And the small town kid in her had taken in the sweet talk. But she'd found out—she'd been going home. She hadn't killed him. Then the voice was explaining.

"Your fingerprints are on the knife, Jackie." Joe said that twice, harshly until she grasped it. "Open your eyes, Jackie," he said. "Have a look."

It was all a dream, a nightmare, part of the strange mist in her head. Soon she'd wake up and all this would end. She'd be on a bus going home, watching the telephone poles tick past, counting the minutes. Counting the minutes until she would see Ralph again. She wondered if he'd be smiling at the station. He'd been so sad-faced when she'd left. Because of her. But he'd be smiling soon. She'd make it up to him for going away. She'd—

It came to her slowly. Her left glove was gone. Funny, she'd never lost a glove before. And they had been a present from Ralph, a going-away good luck present. How could she have been so careless—she was usually so careful about gloves—and why should it worry her so?

"All right, snap out of it." A heavy hand cracked her face—Clint's. "We're taking you."

She snapped out of it. An aching whiteness struck at her eyes. She was in the theatre. A cone of light, streaming from the projector booth was blinding her like blazing sunshine. It ended in a yellow circle at her feet. Her body felt strange, propped up in an armless stiff-backed chair on the stage. Feet shuffled behind her—Joe, the flat-voiced detective. The stage was dirt-covered, a farmland set. Dry earth was caked on her shoes.

She said "Oh!" startled.

A fat, round face hung over her in the darkness, glistening, like a moon in the night

It had lips, thin, pale and compressed. An unlighted cigarette dangled from them, its end flattened. The man's fleshy jowls were blue with beard. But it was his eyes that held her, froze her. They were little and black and hard—as black as the light was white. They were fixed on her face.

The face put a leaping fright in her heart. "I didn't do anything! I don't know what this is all about—"

The lips smiled. "She don't know what it's all about, Joe. Innocent. She's innocent, Joe."

"They're all innocent," Joe agreed.

"She doesn't know about the bus ticket we found in her purse, Joe."

"I was going home!" Jackie said furiously.

"Getting away would be more like it. She had the ticket all ready, didn't she, Joe?"

"That's what the jury will say, Clint. Yep. That's what they'll say all right."

Jackie sagged back in the chair. So a harmless bus ticket was a bludgeon, too. Anything was. They could use anything. She had to tell them. It would sound crazy but they had to know about the party and the unknown stranger who had taken her to the bus. She poured it out to them. She cried as she did it. She told them of Ralph, and of home, and of wanting desperately only to be with him.

"That's a new one about a stranger," Clint said. "She must think we're dumb, eh Joe? She must think we're just a couple of dumb boys."

"But I tell you I wasn't even in this theatre! How could I have done it? How could I have stabbed him—"

Clint laughed. "Not in the theatre, she says." He lifted one hand over his head, suddenly. He wasn't laughing any more. The gesture was a signal. The ache fell away from her eyes. The spotlight was moving. The yellow circle crept slowly to the right of the stage and forward. She followed it, inch by inch. She didn't move her face around. Her dark eyes, round and frightened, strained.

She saw the gleaming knife hilt first, glittering in the yellow spot. Zaggert lay crumpled over a row of broken footlights, face up, one leg dangling off the stage. The sinking blade had severed his tie, a foulard with a pattern of large dark green leaves falling along its length. The leaves had changed color under the flow of his blood. Near his hand fluttered the torn half of the tie. A woman's glove was beside it. It was elbow-length and velvet. It was wine brown in color. It was hers.

SHE dropped her face into her hands, sobbing. Her face grew hot and she knew the spotlight was on her again.

"You knew he'd be in the theatre at eight

o'clock," Clint's voice was a machine. "You thought of the dirty deal he gave you and all the rest. You thought of all the starry-eyed kids he'd get next. You wasn't going to take a kicking around, not you, Jackie. You've got spunk, you have. You thought it all over. You bought the ticket. You got that knife some place, probably at the party, eh Jackie? You had a few drinks for a bracer. You came down here. You put it in him when he got friendly—"

She whispered, "No!" and all her heart was in her trembling voice.

"You gave it to him hard, Jackie—the knife went all the way in. You got scared. Seeing him dead drove you wild. You had to get out, any way. You forgot the knife and the glove. And your shoes, Jackie. Look at your shoes. Stage dirt on them. The dirt was on them when we picked you up at the bus. Right, Joe?"

"Right," Joe agreed. "Lucky we checked the bus stations when the call came in. Her wearing one glove made her easy to spot."

She heard them, her mind reeling.

Clint kept it up. Where was the money she'd taken from Zaggert, he wanted to know. "His wallet was empty when we found him. Zaggert's business partner told us he was carrying eight hundred bucks. What did you do with it, Jackie? Who'd you give it to?"

"I—I told you before. I don't know anything about this, not anything. I didn't see Zaggert tonight. There must be some mistake. There has to be. I couldn't have—"

She broke off, sobbing.

"Why not?" The moon-face, slick with sweat, inched nearer. "You had a couple of drinks too many. You can't even explain where you were, if you weren't here. That's not so good, Jackie. It doesn't stand up. A mysterious party, a man you can't remember. It don't stand up. But fingerprints do. So does your glove near the dead man. And the stage dirt on your shoes. You had to walk across the stage to stab him. There's dirt on Zaggert's shoes, too. Only one other man was here tonight. The watchman. And there's no dirt on his shoes."

She had to get away. She couldn't stand looking at that face. They were so sure. They were both too sure.

Her strange escort. She had to find him, go back into the past alone. She didn't have many friends in the Big City. Four, maybe five. She'd find them, talk to them. One by one. Somebody would remember something. . . .

". . . that money, Jackie. That eight hundred bucks. Where is it? That would tie the whole works into one beautiful knot."

Around my neck; a knot around my neck. Jackie glared at the fleshy-faced detective, balefully, silently. The thin, bitter lips didn't

relax. The hard black eyes were digging into her own.

She felt a climbing, paralyzing fright. The glistening blob of face had a way of freezing her, her body, her mind. Then cold control came to her. The leash on her panic snapped suddenly. She lunged forward and up, sobbing.

HANDS caught at her shoulders, broke her escape. Heavy, gouging hands. They were ready, Clint's hands. They caught and clung, digging, like claws. They pressed her down. She sobbed.

"Get your paws off her, you—"

The explosive voice was somewhere in the forward blackness of the theater. The hands let her go. Fast. She crumpled back into the chair.

The explosive voice came nearer. "I've seen you torture her long enough!"

In front of her, Clint whirled. He was short but thick-shouldered, powerful. He faced the blackness, one shoulder hunched. His left hand, fat and thick, coiled into a fist.

"Get your gun out, Joe."

"It's out, Clint." Softly.

"Can't see him yet. So damned dark off stage. Must be the watchman."

"Must be. Nobody else around. Guess the guy's sweet on the kid here—"

They all waited. They all watched. There was nothing to see out there. They could only hear the mounting rush and scrape of feet. Clint took a slow step forward.

A slender man in a torn blue sweater galvanized out of the blackness. The bright cone of light caught and held his face for an instant.

The face was gaunt and long. The left side of it was knife-scarred from cheekbone to chin. The scar was as long as a finger. She knew him instantly. Slim. Slim Anderson, the theater watchman. She'd been kind to him, she remembered. Smiled at him. Said hello to him. Said good-by. Poor Slim—few people

paid him attention any more. Just a lonely, has-been actor, hanging on with a drab job in a theater after dark.

"I'll handle him," Clint said.

Slim took the stage in flat hands, prepared to vault up. He saw the hulking Clint and stopped, braced against the stage edge, motionless, tense.

She could almost feel his thoughts, as he broke to one side, suddenly, making for Zagert's body. He jostled the dead producer's leg, reaching for the murder knife. The leg swayed like a pendulum. His hand was inches from the hilt when Clint got to him in a diving leap. She could glimpse Slim's white face briefly over one crashing shoulder. Its mouth hung suddenly unhinged and gasping like a hooked fish. Back and forth pistoned the detective's elbows, his thick arms pumping punishment into the watchman. The white face swayed balloon-like in the darkness, then fell out of sight.

Joe said appreciatively, "Nice going. What the hell was he trying to do—wipe her prints off the knife?"

Jackie shuddered. Somewhere a door slammed, reverberating like a pistol shot. A sharp gust of night air chilled her. A side exit door was swinging violently, pried loose by the whipping wind.

Beyond it a green neon light was spelling out:

PENNY ARCADE

It flashed on—off—on—off, blinking like an eyelid. Keeping time with her heart.

How savagely her heart was hurting her! People were hurrying along the streets, hurrying home, hurrying to meet others who thought them important. How she longed to be one of them—hurrying, going home to Ralph. . .

Suddenly she hated the ring of light. It spread about her like some loathsome stain; an accusing finger singling her out, making her different from other people, cutting off escape. . .

Then her depression ebbed. She stiffened a

Can't Keep Grandma In Her Chair

She's as Lively as a Youngster—Now her Backache is better

Many sufferers relieve nagging backache quickly, once they discover that the real cause of their trouble may be tired kidneys.

The kidneys are Nature's chief way of taking the excess acids and waste out of the blood. They help most people pass about 3 pints a day.

When disorder of kidney function permits poisonous matter to remain in your blood, it may cause nagging backache, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up

nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.

Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. They give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from your blood. Get Doan's Pills.

little, studying the spotlight. The yellow circle, pinning her down, was a fixed circle—it lay on the stage like a huge yellow coin, motionless. Beyond its perimeter was darkness. If she could escape into that pitch-black shadow....

She divided quick, searching glances between the detectives. They were staring at the unconscious watchman, not yet noticing her. She was a scared kid to them, that was all. Her only rescuer lay at their feet.

In a sudden, springing motion she jumped out of the chair. She tore free of the clinging spot. The spot darted for her like something alive, but she was already past it. It hopped frantically around the chair, the stage, but she was running beyond it, her footsteps muffled by the clinging dirt. She dodged it like it was fire.

She leaped off the stage.

In the back of her head, she could almost feel Clint staring dumbly at the empty, hopped ring of light. They couldn't see her now. They could hear her but they couldn't see her.

A shaft of pain lanced through her left ankle. She had landed jarringly. She kept running. She was praying. Her eyes were on the door.

"No shooting, Joe!" Clint's voice roared.

In the darkness behind her, his feet were pounding heavily. She heard his fast breathing. He was yards off, but giving it all he had.

He'd dive for her, too, she thought in terror. He'd maul her, chop her down in a lunging tackle the way he'd chopped down Slim. He meant to stop her, no matter what. She was a murderess to him. There was only one way to handle a murderess.

The door loomed up at her. She broke through it like it was a finish line.

In the street it was some time before the city sounds reached her. She dodged sparse traffic against the light, reached the opposite sidewalk, still running madly. A bootblack gawked at her. She vanished under the flashing neon that said PENNY ARCADE.

She needed crowds. She hungered for crowds of people, bustling crowds of people, crowds to screen her off from the heavy, chasing feet, the hard, searching black eyes. A mass of people could blindfold those awful eyes. They would dart about, sure. They would seek and appraise, sure. There would be murder in them, sure. But they wouldn't get a hold on her again in a crowd.

The glare and gayety of the Penny Arcade was a relief, fresh, wonderful relief. She twisted through a network of pinball machines, shooting galleries, dart-throwing games, all crowded with noisy patrons.

She risked a glance behind her, fearfully—she paled. He was standing at the Arcade

entrance, talking rapidly to the bootblack.

SHE almost screamed then. Turning, she saw a trick mirror, one of three lined up along the wall, distorting her weirdly, bloating her slender figure, making her face an impossible caricature.

She was in no mood for fun. She moved from it in a hurry. The second trick mirror did not frighten her. She hardly saw her ludicrous reflection, scare-crow thin, long and lean and gaunt. She was thinking. She could use these mirrors. She could watch him in these mirrors. These mirrors could put eyes in the back of her head.

Blotchy faces, lean faces, fat faces, faces with tiny eyes and thick noses made a passing imprint on the mirrors. Her glance hung on them. No Clint. No sight of him. Not yet. The mirrors reflected caricatures of people but she knew she could recognize him instantly. She would always recognize him instantly.

Harsh laughter grated on her nerves. She went up on tiptoe. A round, sweaty face was leering at her from the mirror. It had dark, hopping eyes. It wagged in the mirror. It tilted. It broke open and laughed heartily. A long sigh escaped her. . . . He might have been Clint's twin.

She saw him then. His profile. She didn't need any more. Fear tightened its bands around her heart. Should she run? He was twisting through the crowd, scanning faces. His dark little eyes would miss nothing, no one.

She had a wild impulse to get out, to run anywhere, to do anything so she could be quit of those hunting eyes. But no. Maybe he wouldn't find her. There was that hope among all these people. And running would draw his eyes like a target. Where could she run to, anyway? Where could she go?

His face was swelling in the mirror. He was closer. The crowd broke before him. There was something in his manner that told them to get out of his way. That he wasn't here for fun. They did so, in a hurry.

She saw him spin some dark-haired girls around roughly, stare into their faces. The girls protested shrilly. He let them protest. He moved on.

He got his eyes on her suddenly. His glance flicked up, caught the mirror. Her gaze joined his.

She saw his eyes freeze. Then he was moving. He lunged for her on a straight line, racing across a dart-throwing lane. Feather-shafted darts came winging at him, whirling for the target. He kept going. She could see him swearing softly.

She tried to run. Her heart wouldn't free her breathing, it hung in her throat like a cork in a bottle. She fought loose her panic,

mauling at the shoulders and arms in front of her.

She heard the pound of his feet. He was hacking a path to her. She could feel his digging, burning eyes on her back. Getting nearer and nearer to her.

She glanced frantically around, hunting a way of escape. A door stood a few feet away—a side door. Her outstretched fingertips darted for the knob.

Pain was in her body. Hard elbows drove into her ribs and she reeled. She didn't care about the pain. The knob was at her fingertips. Escape was at her fingertips. . . .

She seized it, twisted and wrenched with all her might. It didn't give. Hurt from her exertion cut along her arm muscles. She twisted the knob in the reverse, her body a rigid arc, arms straining stiffly. No good. The door held.

She knew then, slowly, and with a terrible finality that she could not escape. Locked. The door was locked.

Footsteps thudded behind her. Clint. Only yards behind. A few feet behind. The echo of his beating footsteps stopped suddenly. There was silence. She heard her own breathing. Her hands fell from the knob. She leaned heavily against the door.

She waited for his hands to take her. There was only silence. She knew he was behind her but there was only silence. The silence lengthened. He didn't touch her.

She was suddenly so tired. She wouldn't turn. She couldn't look at those awful eyes.

Something spun slowly in her head, around and around. It picked up speed like a record spinning. Faster and faster. Crazy, but a voice was reeling around on the record. Not a singing voice.

The voice said, "Easy, Jackie. Maybe you didn't do it. Maybe you didn't kill him, after all. Listen to me. Listen—" Then the record was whirring dizzily. She remembered trying to listen and then that was all she remembered.

WHEN she came to she was back in the theater, crumpled in a front row seat. She sat up, blinking. She waited for the voices but they didn't come. No hands held her shoulders. Somebody stuck a cigarette in her lips, provided a light. She puffed on it, dazed.

"Hello, Jackie." It was Joe—Joe's voice. He was seated in a front seat beside her, whispering out of the side of his mouth. His eyes were intent on the stage. A gun in his hand followed the line of his eyes.

She followed the path of his glance. The huge yellow coin was gleaming on the dark earth-covered boards. She heard the scrape of feet and the growl of voices and a tall, twist-

ing form teetered in the middle of the coin.

A harsh voice said, "Stay there." Clint's. She couldn't see him. He was standing outside the loop of light.

Slim Anderson's face was angular and gaunt—she recognized the watchman by the long knife scar. What did they want with him now?

Clint said, "Lots of people could have killed Zaggert, Slim. That's abc. Lots of women. Lots of men who cared for those women. Okay. But only two people were in the theater when he finally got it. Two, Slim. You and the girl."

The long-jawed face, shining in the dazzle of the spot, hardened. Muscles throbbed along Slim's jaw like a pulse. He said, "First you slam the kid around and now it's me. You're a hero, you are. You're a great guy. Except for one thing." Sarcastically, Slim told him that one thing. He told Clint he was crazy "And you don't scare me for a minute, either."

"Had it all figured out, didn't you, Slim?" Clint broke in evenly. "You'd get the dough and kill the man you hated. Eight hundred bucks could do a man like you a favor. And the kid would pay with her neck."

Slim laughed. Crazy was the word for him all right, for Clint. He'd just had his head knocked off, trying to do right by the kid. He said she was one in a thousand and he knew it because he'd seen thousands come and go. "And now a hero like you tells me I'm after her neck. Crazy. You got a couple o' wheels loose."

The voice in the darkness was unimpressed "Funny thing, Slim. Everything points to the girl. The fingerprints, the stage dirt on her shoes, the glove near the dead man. When we picked her up she was wearing the mat to that glove." He paused. The silence had a racing heartbeat in it. "Funny, Slim. She had plenty of time to get rid of that glove the one she was wearing. But she didn't. Know why she didn't, Slim? Because she didn't know where the other glove was. She didn't know it was near a dead man. She didn't even know a man was dead!"

There was a pause. She could hear Slim breathing. A row of tiny beads budded on his face. He wiped at them. His hand was big boned, long with thick, strong fingers. His hands clenched into fists. He squinted, said "This doggone light on my face. Quit talkin in circles and get me off here."

Clint said he wasn't fooling anybody "You're listening damn close to me. Listen some more, Slim. The kid went to a wild party. She met somebody at the party—somebody she knew, somebody she trusted Slim. Take a guess, Slim. Who did she meet at that party?"

(Continued on page 91)

THE LADY FROM HELL

By Zeta Rothschild

She was kind to those who had little to live for, and a lot of money to do it with, the smiling, little lady of Liege—whose ministering hands brought death!

THAT "practice makes perfect" may hold true of most of the human race, but fortunately it doesn't apply to most murderers. Yet there was the fantastic case of Marie Becker, Belgium's bedside Borgia, who, on one particular October morning in 1936, was giving Liege's Commissioner of Police Honore Le Brun a particularly violent brand of headache. She was to prove to have been responsible for the deaths of more than thirty persons—but, for the time being, official suspicion was one thing, proof another.

On Commissioner Le Brun's desk were complaints from half a dozen well-known and respected citizens of the city, received at headquarters during the last three years.

One Madame Ottilie Crulle had died in 1933. In her will she left her friend, Hans Smets, her entire estate of several hundred thousand francs. Relatives had complained. Not only had they resented the will but they said the old lady's jewelry and a packet of bonds she kept in her apartment had disappeared.

Inspector Van der Noorda had been sent to investigate. His report was on the commissioner's desk, attached to the complaint.

Madame Crulle had been in her late eighties. A reputable physician had signed the death certificate, giving heart attack as the cause of death. Interviewed, he said he knew of no suspicious circumstances.

The will had been drawn up by a well-known Liege lawyer. The signature, admitted even the relatives, was in the script of Madame Crulle. And it was the old lady's privilege to leave her estate to whom she wished—even to a youth whom she had already long befriended. As for the missing jewels and bonds, the woman whom the relatives accused of theft insisted Madame Crulle had given them to her long before her death, in return for her kindness.

The police soon dropped the case and the relatives had to be resigned.

A year later, two more complaints anent

the sudden deaths of two old ladies had been received by the Liege police. Madame Bulte, in her seventies, had died suddenly. She, like Madame Crulle, had lived alone. On her death relatives found a casket of jewelry, family heirlooms, missing.

They suspected a woman, a newly-acquired friend of Madame Bulte, who had attended the latter's last moments, had made off with this jewelry.

Madame Lange, seventy-eight, also had died in agony after drinking port brought her by a chance acquaintance on a park bench. Here, too, relatives complained of missing jewelry and bonds.

And the same woman had been named by all three complainants—a Mrs. Marie Becker.

There had been no way of disputing Madame Marie Becker's claim that some of the jewelry had been a gift to her. Other pieces had probably gone to other friends, said the Becker woman. And without proof to the contrary, those vague accusations continued to be shelved.

But now a much more serious charge had come that very morning to Commissioner Le Brun's desk. His mother, wrote one Henri Weiss of 62 Rue St. Gilles, had died after twenty-four hours of great pain. Although she was eighty, Dr. Bara, the family physician, knew of no reason for her sudden death, or the symptoms connected with it.

Mr. Weiss, who lived in Brussels, had been summoned to Liege by his mother's servant of many years. But he had not arrived before her death. He had found a Mrs. Marie Becker, a recent acquaintance, of whom Anna, the servant, did not approve, in charge.

That wasn't his complaint, however. Mr. Weiss reported the disappearance of an old brown satchel, in which his mother had kept about five thousand francs in gold pieces. Also jewelry and bonds were missing—but it was the agony of his mother's last hours that prompted the son to write. Both he and Dr. Bara thought an autopsy would clear up their



Marie Becker's approach to her victim ran along a regular pattern. . . .

doubts and the suspicions they both entertained.

TWENTY-FOUR hours later Dr. Jean Firquet, of the University of Liege faculty, had his report ready. The autopsy showed that Madame Weiss had died of an overdose of digitalin—but at no point in her treatment had Dr. Bara prescribed digitalin for his patient. Yet the quantity found could have been responsible for the racking pains that had led to the victim's death.

Principal Inspector Boncin was now sent to bring Madame Marie Becker, the woman who had taken over the sick-room of Madame Weiss, to headquarters. During her absence Inspector Van der Noorda was to make an examination of her home.

The appearance of Madame Becker gave even Commissioner Le Brun, experienced as he was, a surprise. She was a woman in her sixties, but she was dressed in a gay plaid suit of grey and green, a large black hat with a veil that lent a flattering fog to the painted face behind it. Her hair, dyed a deep red, was not a very skillful job. Her cheeks were rouged, her eyes had a rim of mascara; her lips, with the help of lipstick, gave off a dazzling red.

"Madame Weiss was my friend," she explained. "She liked my company. She was lonely. She gave me many gifts."

Also, she protested she knew of no reason why the lady's last hours should have been so full of pain.

The telephone now rang on the commissioner's desk. At the other end was Van der Noorda. When he hung up, the commissioner had the information necessary for a more direct attack.

"In your room is the missing brown satchel with gold pieces," he now reminded Madame Becker. "In the handbag in your bureau was a bottle of digitalin tablets. It seems to me you owe us an explanation."

Madame Becker shrugged her shoulders. Madame Weiss had given her the satchel with its contents long before her death. The digitalin was for her own use. It had been prescribed for her, the prescription filled in a legitimate manner.

Despite this explanation and her protests, Le Brun decided to hold Madame Becker in custody.

On his return, Van der Noorda added to the details of his search of Madame Becker's room. The room was shabbily furnished, with a gas burner for cooking, but contrasting with this poverty, its wardrobe held about two dozen handsome gowns, labeled with the names of the best dressmakers of Liege.

In the bureau Van der Noorda had found a collection of jewelry, including a locket with

the initials "W. L.," reported missing by the relatives of Madame Lange. Several other pieces the inspector had recognized from descriptions of missing jewelry belonging to Mmes. Bulte and Crulle. A pearl necklace, a bracelet set with diamonds, and other costly adornments were tucked away among stockings and handkerchiefs.

The evidence warranted contacting the families of the Mmes. Bulte, Crulle and Lange, and asking them to agree to autopsies. Le Brun then set Van der Noorda to try to locate the druggist who had sold Madame Becker her bottle of digitalin.

Van der Noorda had also found in the room a snapshot of Madame Becker, with a man much her junior. Several copies were quickly made. Armed with these reproductions a half dozen inspectors went out to locate the source of Madame Becker's digitalin supply.

Found in the room also was a bottle of port, like those Madame Becker had been wont to bestow on her friends. This was sent to the police laboratory for analysis.

The relatives of the three old ladies, former friends of Madame Becker, willingly agreed to the autopsies, and arrangements were soon made for the exhumation of the bodies.

Before the end of the week, Commissioner Le Brun was convinced he was making headway, for, reported Dr. Firquet, a prodigious amount of digitalin had been found in each of the three corpses.

The trail of the druggist was a little more complicated. After numerous visits, however, Inspector Haasen had located two druggists, Chemiat Vanderbosch of the Boulevard Constitution, and Pharmacist Jansen of the Quartier du Nord, who had recognized the photo of Madame Becker. The former, after consulting his records, said he had sold Madame Becker nine bottles of fifty tablets each, between the years 1933 and 1936. And Jansen had sold her, during the same period, six bottles. According to the register every druggist must fill in, the physician who made out the prescription was a Dr. Georges Matrat—but the quantity used by Mme. Becker was still fantastic.

Dr. Matrat had been known to Le Brun himself as a medical man of good standing—but Matrat had died five years ago!

Madame Becker, brought in again for questioning, did not seem at all disturbed.

"I got the original prescription from Dr. Matrat but only had it filled long after his death," she explained.

However, the digitalin had not been solely for her own use. She had bought it for Madame Doumene, a Dutch lady. Digitalin was cheaper in Belgium than in Holland, she added.

But Madame Doumene's address she could not or would not give. She didn't know it, Madame Becker protested. Madame Doumene simply appeared in Liege at intervals, called for the bottles of digitaline and left. She knew nothing more of the lady.

COMMISSIONER LE BRUN decided to break the story in the local newspapers, hoping thereby to get more information from those who had known Madame Becker during these past few years.

The results more than justified this move. "Our daughter died an agonizing death, with Madame Becker at her bedside," wrote the parents of Anna Seward.

Moreover, Madame Becker had borrowed eight hundred francs from their daughter, who operated a successful stationery store. She had given her a note for the sum. Anna, the day of her death, had told her mother this note was in her strong box. But it was not, the mother found—it and a bundle of money Anna Seward kept for payment of bills were missing.

The families of Madame Aline-Damoulte and the Widow Jeanne Peyet reported these two old ladies had died sudden and agonizing deaths, with Madame Marie Becker in attendance. Again jewelry and notes were missing. Two old ladies, Madame Daubresse and Madame Valle, came themselves to headquarters to tell of their experiences. After drinking port that Madame Becker had brought to each of them, they had become violently ill.

Fortunately, they both recovered. But one found over a thousand francs missing, the other a casket of jewelry. And Madame Becker, so devoted in her attentions before, never again appeared at their homes. In fact, she had moved from her old address and they had never been able to locate her until now.

Only two men had been victimized by the port-bearing Marie Becker. One Lambert Beyer, who died in February, 1934, had known Marie Becker many years earlier. She had followed him into the Saint Gerard Church for the eleven o'clock Mass one day and renewed their "friendship" as they both knelt in prayer.

Madame Becker told friends she was going to marry Lambert Beyer. But the old man had been wary. Then he had become violently ill and died from a sudden heart attack brought on, said the death certificate, by acute indigestion.

Relatives said there were twelve thousand francs missing from his strongbox, as well as stocks and bonds.

Madame Becker claimed Beyer had given her the money and bonds on his deathbed, but the Beyer family, doing some investigation on its own, had traced the bonds from a list

found in the dead man's desk and learned that these bonds had been sold by Marie Becker two weeks before Beyer's death.

The other masculine victim was Eugene L'Homme in whose home Madame Becker, who then lived in the same apartment house, had been a frequent visitor. Over five thousand francs were missing after his sudden death one afternoon, when Marie Becker had come to relieve his wife. But no accusation had been made.

Then the widow, a few months later, had become suddenly ill and died. And Marie Becker had presented a will making her the sole legatee.

But relatives had so protested this will that even Marie Becker had hesitated, and an earlier will was finally probated. But the relatives were convinced, they now told Commissioner Le Brun, that Madame Becker had taken jewelry and bonds.

Suspicion, of course, was not enough. And Le Brun now tried to find what evidence he could to back up these stories.

Madame Crulle's protegee, Hans Smets, was brought to headquarters. He testified as follows:

"Madame Becker wrote me of the will before Madame Crulle's death. She said unless I gave her one hundred thousand francs she would destroy the document."

He had paid her the money on receiving his inheritance and produced the note to prove his story.

Next, jewelry Madame Becker claimed had been given her by Madame Lange on her death bed, turned up at the official pawnshop of the city. According to the records, this diamond-studded locket had been pawned three days before the old lady's death.

"I pawned that jewelry for Madame Lange at her request," explained Madame Becker. "She was in need of money."

But Madame Lange had an ample income which came in regularly, protested relatives. She did not have to pawn family heirlooms.

Anna Seward had returned the note given for the loan of eight hundred francs, said Madame Becker, when she paid her the money.

But Inspector Van der Noorda learned that a few days before Anna Seward's death Marie Becker had been so broke that she was about to be evicted from her room. The day after the young woman's passing, she had paid off her landlady in full. Whence had come this money—if not from the looted cash box of Anna Seward?

One Max Hody, a traveling salesman and one of the few survivors of Marie Becker's friendliness was brought to headquarters on his next visit to Liege, and admitted having pawned valuable pieces of jewelry for her.

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ZEMO

New Detective Magazine

Marie Becker's approach to her victims had been along a regular pattern. Old ladies living alone, were wont to sun themselves or pleasant days on the benches that line the boulevards of Liege. They had welcomed a chat with an eager listener.

Even without an invitation Marie Becker would drop in on them. With her she would bring a gift—the fateful bottle of port. In a few days the old lady would find herself enduring gripping pains, with death a welcome release.

Reports were now in from Dr. Firquet. The bodies of the old ladies Lange, Crulle and Bulte showed enormous amounts of digitalin which, their attending physicians were prepared to swear on the witness stand, had never been prescribed by them.

With the consent of their respective families, the bodies of other friends of Marie Becker, fifteen in all, had been exhumed. And in each Dr. Firquet had found digitalin.

It was not possible to develop evidence tying up Marie Becker with all these deaths. But in June, 1939, Marie Becker went on trial in the Liege Assizes, charged with the murder of eleven persons: one in 1933, two in 1934 four in 1935 and another four in 1936. She was also accused of five attempts that failed

FOR one month and a day the jury listened to the array of witnesses provided by the state. The defending attorneys, Henri Chevalier and Paul Remy, put up a good fight—and Marie Becker screamed from the witness box:

"The witnesses are avaricious relatives. They think only of money. They were disappointed in their inheritances and therefore accuse me."

Most impressive was the testimony of one Jean Rouler, porter at the Dominican Convent in Liege.

Madame Becker had come to him one day in 1935 and asked him for the names of old ladies who came there.

"But wealthy and lonely old ladies," she had added. "I want to cheer them."

A jury found Marie Becker guilty of all minor counts as well as of first degree murder. And the woman who specialized in poisoning old people was given the death sentence.

But Belgium does not believe in capital punishment. It does not even possess a guillotine, and the death sentence was automatically commuted to life imprisonment.

The last word concerning Belgium's Borgis reached this country in June, 1942. Buried among more momentous news of war and sacrifice—a few brief lines announced the death in prison of Marie Becker.

I'll Be Killing You—

(Continued from page 47)

and if you are wise you won't want any part of me!"

Satan opened the door and left the room. He scribbled a note about the two witnesses and sent it in to Sergeant Kane. Then he slipped through a side exit of the club, flagged a taxi and drove straight to the residence of Doctor Scranton, the medical examiner.

A sleepy-eyed woman let him in and told him to wait. It was a good hour before the doctor showed up. The medical examiner swung into the little library, threw down his bag, tossed his coat and hat on a chair and turned to Satan.

"Well," he said. "It was a nice clean job—just above the right eye." He lifted the cast on Satan's right arm, noticed the small black hole in the end of it. Then he cut along the plaster of paris with deft, sure movement, tore it off.

"Not even a burn," the doctor said with some satisfaction. "A few powder stains only. Of course I knew you had a reason for having the gun there." He lifted out the tiny twenty-five automatic. "But I didn't know it was for a killing like that. Remarkable shooting, Satan, and pretty lucky with so small a caliber gun. Do you know all the people think you did it with your left hand? Others say so, too. It will be a great story for the papers when it comes out." And with a frown. "But not for me."

"It isn't coming out," said Satan. "They'll believe anything of me, if they continue to believe I drew that fast. I suppose the commissioner will be raising hell."

"No, no." The doctor shook his head as he stripped the last piece of adhesive tape from Satan's arm. "I found a torn piece of paper in Frankie Luntz' pocket. Put together it read: 'If Satan lives tonight—he'll know who murdered Inspector Grahame.' It was like an invitation for him to kill you."

"The little rat," said Satan.

"You suspect who wrote it?" The doctor looked up. "But you won't be able to prove it, Satan. The message was printed."

"That's good," said Satan. "That's good enough—for now." For Satan suddenly realized that, if Nan Connors sent that note, she did it before her father was out of prison and had telephoned her.

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New Detective Magazine

(Continued from page 77)

Pietzel—giving in bloody detail the methods which he had used in each case, and gloating upon the satisfaction which he obtained from the murders. It was so revolting that only a small part of it could be printed.

The police of Philadelphia checked over Holmes' statements. They found positive proof that he had murdered twelve people, but were unable to obtain evidence concerning the others. They, however, expressed the opinion that Holmes had told the truth, and that at least twenty-seven had met a horrible end at the hands of this envenomed monster. How many more there may have been that he didn't mention will never be known.

Holmes' saga was done.

HOLMES went on trial for the murder of Benjamin Pietzel, the father of the three children, on October 28, 1895. Huge crowds fought and scrambled for a place in the courtroom, and there was such disorder that the police reserves had to be called out to restore order.

There was such a plethora of evidence that everyone was certain of the result. The jury was out scarcely a half hour before it returned with a verdict of guilty of murder in the first degree.

Holmes was sentenced to be hanged.

The way in which he went to his death testified to his complete callousness. The night before his last day on earth he slept peacefully for seven hours. He dressed carefully, ate a big breakfast with apparent appetite and walked up the steps of the scaffold without nervousness. He smirked at the spectators as the noose and the traditional black cap were adjusted.

Fifteen minutes later Dr. Butcher, the prison physician, pronounced him dead.

It was the end of a murderer as ruthless and diabolical as this or any other country has ever known.

The motive for these wholesale killings was given by Holmes in the first part of the statement which he had some time earlier given to the press:

I was born with the devil in me. The inclination to murder came to me as naturally as the inclination to do right comes to the majority of persons. Where others' hearts were touched with pity, mine was filled with cruelty. I reveled in the thought and act of destroying life. I am convinced that I no longer have anything human in me.

With the latter statement no one familiar with the Holmes case will quarrel.

(Continued from page 83)

Slim said he was getting queerer all the time, asking him a stupid question like that. How the hell would he know, he said.

"Because you were there." Clint sank his voice into him steadily. "She got plenty tipsy at the party, Jackie did. But she had to make the bus even if she couldn't walk straight. You offered to take her there. She accepted. You were a friend, she thought. Only you didn't help her to the bus. You got a plan then, a murder plan. You took her to the theatre instead. She was so dizzy she didn't know the time. You killed Zaggert. You ripped the glove off her hand, dropped it near the body, and walked her along the stage—"

Slim swore furiously.

"Easy to get her to hold the knife by the handle," Clint said. "A drunken kid doesn't know a lot. A drunken kid wouldn't know her hand was on a murder knife." His voice hardened. "I thought stage dirt on shoes would point to the killer. I was wrong, Slim. I found that out a minute ago, from a dart game in the Penny Arcade. Zaggert wasn't stabbed at all. You took the knife in your fingertips, after getting the kid's prints on the hilt. The knife was *thrown*—thrown from a distance.

Thrown from off the stage. That's why there's no dirt on your shoes."

Slim leaped out of the clinging spot. Again the yellow circle was darting all over the stage. The darting ceased. The spot nailed him—both of them.

The savage hands had worked a bony noose around Clint's throat. The watchman's knee was jammed against the detective's stomach, kicking. Clint hung on, helpless.

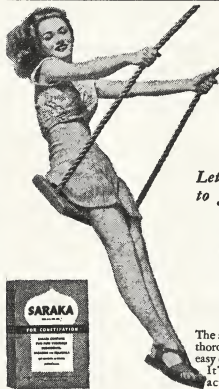
Then Joe's gun exploded, putting a roaring in her mind. In the glaring spot, Slim's hands, and Slim, dropped limply.

Minutes later, the detectives were around her. Clint's face was ashen, but he was recovering from the beating. He rustled a sheaf of bills in his hand. "Eight hundred bucks. Zaggert's. In Slim's hip pocket."

Joe grunted. "He was smart. He went for that knife before to wipe off his *own* fingerprints. Quite a head on him, making it look like he was helping her."

"I don't know," Clint rubbed at his neck. "Queer guy," he said. "My hunch is he was after more than dough. Lonely. Can't tell how a queer, lonely guy will think—"

"Yeah," Joe agreed. "Can't tell, at that." "C'mon, Jackie." Clint took her arm. His voice was soft. "I'm taking you to the bus."



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Eleven Answers—Aachen, 3083; *Case Ace, 1033; *Age, 2602; *Alackaday, 1749; *Alphamega, 239; *Amanovietus, 2913; *Amoroj, 166; *P. J. B., 2359; *Mrs. H. R. Bailey, 113; *Bert, 1811; *S. H. Berwald, 757; *Alpha Bet, 1679; Harry Blanck, 39; Bonanza, Inc., 50; *Florence B. Boulton, 173; *Mrs. C. G. Burroughs, 3849; *Carnio, 1639; *Eileen Casey, 425; *Ceebee, 704; *Chemystic, 1498; *Clntra, 852; *CIPHERMIT, 3282; *CIPHERSMITH, 1775; *A.B.C., 1829; *Judson H. Clark, 2603; *R.C.C., 438; *Clocker, 143; *Codola, 1203; *Corbeau, 11; *Floyd E. Cosa, 1389; *Jos. M. Crosby, 2576; *Dara Cross, 827; *Cryptophile, 520; *M. E. Cutcomb, 194; *Jump o'er Dumb, 306; *Debutant, 674; *Kay Dee, 339; *J. N. D., 1031; *Gunga Din, 571; *Drol, 1839; *M. E., 3500; *Mr. E. H., 87; *Harry W. Ebner, 1070; *Eve Eden, 1173; *Eddee, 1240; *Envy EL, 1856; *Elbetee, 750; *Engineer III, 1535; *Arty Ess, 3056; *Jay-En-Ess, 1494; *Ewie, 108; *Twice, 171; *Brymarc, 2716; *Michael D. Fabling, 300; *Femo, 400; *G. Fulton, 4437; *Allah Gater, 178; *Clarence P. Greene, 1109; *Gus, 11; *Gyrline, 55; *Henry J. Haeweker, 1750; *S. R. Hart, 701; *Hayrake, 1107; *T. Hegarty, 3207; *Henty, 956; *Jack-HL, 835; *Frank P. Hobson, 90; *D. H. Holcomb, 1209; *G. M. Howe, 3423; *L. S. H., 2193; *Tilly, 568; *Jim Jackson, 161; *Jaybe, 1357; *Jayel, 402; *Jeb, 46; *Uncle Jim, 2461; *D. V. J., 1031; *Jay Ray, 641; *Betty Kelly, 354; *J. C. K., 2779; *P. A. L., 34; *S. A. L., 189; *Legerdemainist, 641; *Mrs. Legerdemainist, 132; *Lesherr, 738; *P. Mack, 68; *Marcia, 1162; *Martory, 132; *Theo. W. Midlam, 3021; *Les A. Miller, 1505; *Ready Money, 25; *Momback, 2216; *Nednah, 2355; *Clarence Nellman, 120; *Philip R. Nichols, 482; *Lorenzo D. Padgett, 770; *Pampoundo, 588; *Albert B. Pasher, 189; *W. F. P., 2795; *Kee Pon, 904; *Abe C. Pressman, 1239; *L. K. Presswood, 263; *Bolzaute-Quinze, 209; *B. R. 818; *Fred E. Naser, 1192; *Trebled Reiler, 479; *Don Ricardo, 117; *Ray B. Richter, 1310; *Wm. G. Ringer, 1135; *Ty Roe, 1337; *Rogue, 181; *Alice Routh, 3583; *Rush, 45; *Mrs. H. A. Seals, 2747; *W. E. S., 70; *R. B. Shrewsbury, 1338; *Logan Simard, 1117; *Sleivy, 911; *Sam Sniegal, 2427; *M. G. R., 1563; *Jack-Stay, 3556; *Stoney, 23; *Dad S., 223; *P. H. T., 1420; *Trot, 125; *Troy V., 2283; *W. G. Valentine, 1249; *Chl Vaker, 905; *Arline F. Vaughn, 157; *Volund, 1618; *Mrs. James Wallen, 2798; *Sir Walter, 35; *P. Wee, 1675; *Ruth E. Weiss, 41; *Siva Welsh, 211; *E. H. Werner, 1217; *Arthur Whitfield, 191; *Reg Williams, 966; *Willray, 1199; *H. W., 1172; *Ike N. Wynne, 3400; *Doctor X, 3689; *Xad, 1592; *Yarbie, 712; *J36, 192.

Ten Answers—*Mrs. Hugh Boyd, 178; *King Cedric, 245; *Helen P. Foote, 1076; *Gregory, 1648; *G. Hirono, 736; *Jaxon, 218; *J. E. L., 148; *Lucille Little, 1878; *Kenny H., 39; *M. C. Seward, 50; *Ella P. Shiley, 904; *Tyro XIII, 10; *Bret Harte Whitman, Jr., 135; *X-31, 125.

Nine Answers—*Mary-Anne, 9; *K. R. Hess, 116; *Betty S. P., 529; *Wash, 1415.

Eight Answers—*Marguerite Gleason, 313; *Moe Lando, 8; *Ubez, 1385.

Seven Answers—*Laird, 1062; *Soundough, 188; *Twas, 157.

Six Answers—*Mary Bonano, 23.

Five Answers—*Art Covey, 135; *Robert H. Ham-mack, 35; *Sactocal, 5.

Four Answers—*Thyram, 285.

Two Answers—*H. F. Pool, 2; *M. L. Weiser, 7.

CIPHER SOLVERS' CLUB FOR JUNE, 1944

Eleven Answers—Aachen, 3084; *Case Ace, 1044; *Age, 2613; *Alackaday, 1750; *Alphamega, 250; *Amanovietus, 2924; *Amoroj, 177; *Attenet, 652; *P. J. B., 2370; *Mrs. H. H. Bailey, 125; *Bert, 1822; *S. H. Berwald, 768; *Alpha Bet, 1590; *Harry Blanck, 44; *Florence B. Boulton, 184; *Mrs.

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C. G. Burroughs, 3060; *Carao, 1650; †Beale
Casey, 436; *Chemystic, 1509; *CIPHERMIT, 3293;
*CIPHERSMITH, 1786; *A. B. C. 1840; *Judson H.
Clark, 2074; †H. C. C. 450; †CLOCKER, 144; *Codola,
1214; *Floyd E. Cross, 1400; *Jos. M. Crosby, 2587;
*Darn Cross, 838; Cryptocal, 39; *Cryptophile,
531; †M. E. Cntcomb, 205; †Jump o'er Dum, 877;
*Debutant, 686; †Kay Dee, 410; *Ganza Din, 582;
*Silver Dollar, 1081; *Drol, 1850; *M. E., 3511;
Mr. E. 08; *Harry W. Eber, 1081; †Clim Eddy,
419; *Eve Eden, 1184; *Edna, 1251; *Envy El,
1867; *Arya Eos, 3667; *Jay-En-Eos, 1905; †Erie,
119; †Ewie, 182; *Brymarc, 2727; *Michael D.
Fabling, 611; †Femo, 480; *G. Fulton, 4448; †Allah
Gator, 189; †Marguerite Gleason, 324; *Clarence
P. Greene, 1120; Gus, 22; Gyrine, 66; *Henry J.
Haewecker, 1761; *S. R. Hart, 802; *Hayrake,
1128; *T. Hegarty, 3218; *Henty, 968; *Jack-III,
846; *D. H. Holcomb, 1220; *O. M. Howe, 3434;
*L. S. H., 2204; *Illy, 579; †Jim Jackson, 172;
*Jaybee, 1368; *Jayel, 3783; Jeb, 57; *Uncle Jim,
2472; *D. V. J., 1042; *Jay Kay, 652; †Betty Kelly,
360; *J. C. K., 2790; †S. A. L., 180; *Moe Land,
19; *F. Macia, 89; *Marcia, 7173; †Marley, 144;
*Theo W. Midlam, 2032; *Lee A. Miller, 1576;
Ready Money, 34; *Mossback, 2227; *Needyah, 2577
(corrected); †Clarence Neilson, 131; †Philip R.
Nichols, 493; *Lorenzo D. Padgett, 781; *Pan-
poundo, 599; †Albert D. Pascher, 200; *Penny, 2565;
*W. F. P., 2806; *Kes Don, 915; *Portland, 716;
*Abe C. Pressman, 1250; *B. E. R., *Red E. Raser,
1203; †Theobald Relex, 490; *Don Ricardo, 1188;
*Ray F. Richer, 1321; *Wm. G. Ringer, 1146; *Ty
Roe, 1348; †Rogue, 192; *Alice Routh, 3596; Rush,
56; *Mrs. H. A. Seals, 2758; W. E. S., 81; *Sam
Spiegel, 2438; *M. L. S., 1574; *Jack-Stay, 3597;
*P. H. T., 1437; *Tyro V., 2294; *W. G. Valentine,
1200; *Chl Valor, 916; *Volund, 1629; *Mrs. James
Wallen, 2809; Sir Walter, 47; *P. Wee, 1686; Ruth
E. Weiss, 52; †Arthur Whitfield, 202; †Bret Harte
Whitman, 146; *Rog Williams, 977; *Willray, 1210;
*Doctor X, 3700; *Xail, 1603; †136, 203.

Ten Answers—Bonnie, Inc. 90; †Mrs. Hugh Boyd,
199 (corrected); *Ceebee, 714; *Ribetee, 760; *En-
gineer III, 1545; *G. Hirano, 746; *Jesse C. Leach,
1084; *Lesherr, 748; *Luellie Little, 1888; *Betty
S. P., 539; †L. K. Presswood, 273; M. C. Seward,
60; *Ella O. Sibley, 914; *Sibley, 921; *E. H.
Werner, 1227; *James H. Williams, 712; *Yarbie,
722.

Nine Answers—A. Gardiner, 9; *Gregory, 1657;
*K. R. Hess, 125; H. R. Higgins, 9; *R. B. Shrews-
bury, 1347; †Dad S., 238; *Ike N. Wynne, 3409.

Eight Answers—†J. E. L., 156; †Sourdough, 194;
†Tot, 133; *Wash, 1423.

Seven Answers—*Pearl Knowler, 2301; *Laird,
1069; Sactocal, 12; †X-31, 132.

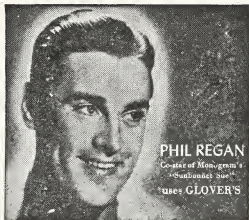
Six Answers—†Jean Gray, 212; Kenny R., 45;
†J. A. B. Tuthill, 108; *Ubes, 1391; †Yhprnm, 291.

Five Answers—M. L. Welser, 12.

Four Answers—H. F. Pool, 6.

Corrections—*Penny, 11 for May, 1944, not pre-
viously credited; *Anidem, 9 for May, 1944, and 11
for Apr., 1944, not previously credited; *Mrs. Hugh
Boyd, and *Needyah, 11 each for Nov., 1943, not
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(Continued from page 6)

He lifted off the barrel's head.

Floating on the top of the reddish liquid were two human legs! And in other barrels which the police opened were the severed arms, head and trunk of a man's body!

By teeth and scars the cadaver was identified as that of Desire Godasse who had been reported missing by his aunt. The best friend of Godasse had been Andre Dubois, a young and sophisticated Parisian who always managed to be "a snappy dresser on and off," as the theatrical people put it, although he had never been known to demean himself by any kind of labor.

Naturally, the police questioned Dubois. The latter seemed surprised and shocked at his friend's death. Desire, he contended, had told him that he was going to the Riviera for several months.

Inspector Mace, an outstanding French sleuth, looked over Dubois' apartment. He noticed that the floor, which showed signs of having been recently scrubbed, was very uneven, due to long wear. He filled a pitcher with water and let it trickle down. It ran toward a spot under the bed and settled in a little pool in what was obviously the lowest point in the room. Mace had the boards dug up.

Underneath there were many stains of human blood, which had seeped through the cracks when Dubois dismembered the body of his "friend," whom he now confessed he had murdered.

"You see," he explained, "I was engaged to be married to a wealthy woman. Marriage with her would have enabled me to live in luxury the rest of my life. I had told her I had plenty of money, as I knew she wouldn't have me if she knew I was penniless. I asked Godasse to lend me 10,000 francs. The stingy miser refused. So I killed him. I had been to the Red Globe many times, and knew how to get into the cellar from the outside without being seen. I had planned carefully how to dispose of the body of putting pieces of it only in full barrels of the rarest wines."

"What difference did that make?" Mace demanded.

"It's much more expensive."

"Suppose it is. What of it?"

"Well, it sells much more slowly."

"All right," the inspector agreed patiently, "and so?"

"Well, I knew it would be a long time, maybe years, before those barrels were empty. By that time I expected to be married and in America."

Mace looked more puzzled than ever. "But I still don't understand," he persisted, "what the kind of wine and how slowly it sells has

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The Witness Chair

to do with it. What I want to know is, why you put the body in wine in the first place."

The murderer's reply is still considered a classic of stupidity by the French police.

"Because," he said, "I had heard that alcohol preserved things. I thought decomposition would not set in until the barrels were empty. And of course the slower the wine sold, the longer it would take for the barrel to get empty."

MANY murderers have betrayed themselves by "signing" their crimes—stamping them unmistakably with their own individual methods of operating—but few have ever trapped themselves so neatly as did Alfred Hoff, in a killing that shocked San Francisco before the turn of the century.

It was late afternoon. In an apartment building on Guerrero Street, the occupants of the second-story flat were preparing for dinner when they heard an agonized scream from the floor above. "My God!" ejaculated one. Wordlessly, they rushed up the stairs to the apartment of Mrs. Mary Clute, a middle-aged widow. The door was unbolted and they burst in. There, in the middle of the floor, lay Mrs. Clute's body, her head crushed in by a blow from some heavy instrument.

Drawers of a chiffonier at the far end of the room had been opened and their contents ransacked, but the murderer had evidently had time for only a hasty search. In an adjoining room was found the murder weapon—a thick iron coupling pin, one end of which was covered with blood and hair.

Informed of the crime, Captain of Police Bohen at once assigned all his operatives to the case and began an intensive search. But clues were slim, and for a time solution of the mystery looked hopeless. All he had to go on, other than the weapon itself, was the testimony of a family named Legg, who lived on the first floor of the house. Old Mr. Legg had been sitting by the fireplace while his daughter-in-law, Lucy, was preparing dinner in the kitchen. Suddenly he heard a scream, followed by the sound of a heavy body striking the floor overhead. Thinking at first it was his daughter-in-law who had screamed, he called out, "Lucy! What's the matter?"

The next minute the girl came out of the kitchen, and he realized that the sounds he had heard must have come from a floor above. Together they hurried out onto the front porch, just in time to see a dark, heavy-set man come out of the alley leading to the rear staircase. They called after him, but he only walked faster, and soon vanished in the gathering twilight.

"Can you describe this man?" Captain Bohen asked.

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New Detective Magazine

"Yes," Mrs. Legg answered readily. "I only saw him for a moment, but I remember him quite clearly. He was a stocky man, about five feet six, with a full dark beard and a mustache. He was wearing a dark suit."

"Do you recall ever seeing him before?"

Mrs. Legg hesitated. "I'm not sure. I have a feeling that I might have seen him around the house before, but I can't quite remember. I wouldn't like to get anyone in trouble unless I'm certain."

And that, in spite of all his pleading, was all Captain Bohlen could get out of her.

His next move was to question Joseph Foley, a carpet layer, who had been seen leaving the house at about the time of the crime. Yes, said Foley, he had been there that afternoon, but he had left Mrs. Clute alive. He and a man named Jackson had been sent to her flat to lay some matting. She had answered the bell and helped them carry the matting upstairs, and shortly afterward Jackson had left to take care of another assignment.

Finishing the work, Foley asked Mrs. Clute what she thought of it. She replied that it satisfied her, and paid him. Foley then left, and going down the stairs, heard the rustling of skirts, as though a woman were coming along the hall above. He did not wait to see who it was.

Captain Bohlen now had three suspects. The murderer might have been the heavy-set man described by Mrs. Legg; Foley, if he was lying; or the unknown woman whom Foley said he had heard as he left the house. But he did not as yet have a single item of evidence against any of them.

FINALLY, days of search uncovered a man answering to Mrs. Legg's description: one Alfred Hoff, residing on Sixth Avenue, whose full name was the improbable one of Alfred F. G. Verenseneckcockhoff. Confronted with him, Mrs. Legg admitted that she had seen him before and that he might have been the man she saw on the night of the murder, but still refused to identify him positively.

Questioned, Hoff denied everything. He had been employed by Mrs. Clute to help her move furniture, make over mattresses, and other odd jobs, but he had not been near the house on the day in question. In spite of hours of grilling, he stuck to his story, and the police were forced to release him.

Then the case took another turn. The crime was the most shocking one San Francisco had experienced in some time, and it had received wide publicity in the newspapers, including photographs of the iron coupling pin with which the widow had been murdered.

The Witness Chair

During the second week after the killing, a man walked into Captain Bohen's office and announced, "I know who murdered Mrs. Clute."

The man had employed Hoff several times in the past, and had noticed a heavy bar of iron in his kit of tools. He asked Hoff what it was.

"A coupling pin," said Hoff.

"But what do you use it for?"

Hoff shrugged. "I carry it with me as a weapon of defense, in case of footpads," he explained.

The next day Captain Bohen's informant, riding on the cable cars of that period noticed a coupling pin, and, of course, was reminded of Hoff. On each of the several following occasions when he again hired the man, he again saw the coupling pin, until at last he was as familiar with it, probably, as Hoff himself.

The result was that coupling pins and Alfred Hoff were indivisibly associated in his mind. When, on returning from a business trip out of the city he had seen the photographs of the murder weapon in the newspapers, he had known immediately who the killer must be.

Hoff was arrested at once, and, faced by his accuser, finally confessed. He was convicted by a jury of aroused San Franciscans, and went to the gallows.

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